



MAHATMA GANDHI

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MAHATMA GANDHI:  
*the V. R. Rao portrait in India House, London*

# MAHATMA GANDHI

*by*

H. S. L. POLAK, H. N. BRAILSFORD  
LORD PETHICK-LAWRENCE

*with a Foreword and Appreciation by*

HER EXCELLENCY  
SAROJINI NAIDU  
GOVERNOR OF THE UNITED PROVINCES



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*The only virtue I want to claim is  
truth and non-violence. I lay no claim  
to superhuman powers: I want none.*

GANDHI

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# THE FATHER OF MODERN INDIA

*An appreciation by*

HER EXCELLENCY SAROJINI NAIDU

*Mrs. Sarojini Naidu—poetess, orator, politician and Indian women's leader—was for thirty years one of Gandhi's closest friends and disciples. Born in 1879, she was educated in Hyderabad, at King's College, London, and at Girton, Cambridge. In 1898 she married Dr. M. G. Naidu, Principal Medical Officer to the Nizam of Hyderabad, and has two sons and two daughters. She became one of the most prominent leaders of Congress, and was elected President in 1925. Mrs. Naidu accompanied Gandhi to the Round Table Conference in London, 1931, and in 1947 was appointed Governor of the United Provinces.*

THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS is at hand, but this year neither the clay lamps of our villages nor the silver lamps of our cities will be kindled in honour of Dipavali,<sup>1</sup> because the heart of the nation still deeply mourns the death of Mahatma Gandhi, who redeemed it from centuries of bondage and gave to India her freedom and her flag.

It grows more and more difficult for me to speak or write about him. I almost repent my rash and hasty promise to contribute a brief foreword to this book, the story of Gandhiji's life (which I have not yet had the pleasure of reading), written by three distinguished British friends and admirers of the Mahatma, as I fear it might be a little irrelevant and alien to the objective approach and context of

<sup>1</sup> Festival in honour of Lakshmi, Goddess of Prosperity.

their writing. All three have been animated with a due sense of their high privilege and responsibility, and have fulfilled their self-chosen task with deep sincerity, notable skill and discrimination, worthy of a theme so noble. But for me, as for many of us who were so intimately associated with Mahatma Gandhi in his great campaigns of liberation for India, who marched with him to many prisons under his banner, who time and again kept vigil and shared the anguish of his epic fasts for the sins of those whom he loved or those who hated him, it becomes almost an act of vivisection to attempt to analyse or interpret the unique personality, the mind and the spirit of this rare, this unrivalled, being, who was not only our leader, our friend, our father, but literally an integral part of life itself.

Curiously enough, my first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi took place in London on the eve of the great European War of 1914, when he arrived fresh from his triumphs in South Africa, where he had initiated his principle of passive resistance and won a victory for his countrymen, who were at that time chiefly indentured labourers, over the redoubtable General Smuts. I had not been able to meet his ship on his arrival, but the next afternoon I went wandering round in search of his lodging in an obscure part of Kensington and climbed the steep stairs of an old, unfashionable house, to find an open door framing a living picture of a little man with a shaven head, seated on the floor on a black prison blanket and eating a messy meal of squashed tomatoes and olive oil out of a wooden prison bowl. Around him were ranged some battered tins of parched groundnuts and tasteless biscuits of dried plantain flour. I burst instinctively into happy laughter at this amusing and unexpected vision of a famous leader, whose name had already become a household word in our country. He lifted his eyes and laughed back at me, saying: "Ah, you must be Mrs. Naidu!" Who else dare be so irreverent? "Come in," said he, "and share my meal." "No, thanks," I replied, sniffing; "what an abominable mess it is!" In this way and at that instant commenced our friendship, which flowered into real comradeship, and bore fruit in a long, loving, loyal discipleship, which never wavered for a single hour through more than thirty years of common service in the cause of India's freedom.

How, and in what lexicons of the world's tongues, shall I find

words of adequate beauty and power that might serve, even approximately, to portray the rare and exquisite courtesy and compassion, courage, wisdom, humour and humanity of this unique man, who was assuredly a lineal descendant of all the great teachers who taught the gospel of Love, Truth and Peace for the salvation of humanity, and who was essentially akin to all the saints and prophets, religious reformers and spiritual revolutionaries of all times and lands? Like Gautama Buddha, he was a lord of infinite compassion; he exemplified in his daily life Christ's Sermon from the Mount of Olives; both by precept and practice he realized the Prophet Mahomet's beautiful message of democratic brotherhood and equality of all mankind. He was—though it sounds obsolete and almost paradoxical to use such a phrase—literally a man of God, in all the depth, fullness and richness of its implications, who, especially in the later years of his own life, was regarded by millions of his fellow men as himself a living symbol of Godhead. But while this man of God inspired in us awe and veneration because of his supreme greatness, he endeared himself to us and evoked our warmest love by the very faults and follies which he shared with our frail humanity.

I love to remember him as a playmate of little children, as the giver of solace to the sorrowful, the oppressed and the fallen. I love to recall the picture of him at his evening prayers, facing a multitude of worshippers, with the full moon slowly rising above a silver sea, the very spirit of immemorial India; and, with but a brief interval, to find him seated with bent brows, giving counsel to statesmen responsible for the policies and programmes of political India, the very spirit of renascent India demanding her equal place among the world nations. But perhaps the most poignant and memorable of all is the last picture of him walking to his prayers at the sunset hour on 30 January, 1948, translated in a tragic instant of martyrdom from mortality to immortality.

SAROJINI NAIDU

Lucknow

*Dipavali,  
October, 1948*

# EARLY YEARS

## 1869-1914

By H. S. L. POLAK

*H. S. L. Polak was born at Dover, England, in 1882, educated in London and articulated as a solicitor to M. K. Gandhi in Johannesburg, 1905-08. In 1904 he launched Gandhi on the "simple-life" practice which he maintained until his death, and was a pioneer member of Gandhi's earliest settlement at Phoenix, Natal. He edited Indian Opinion for many years. In 1919 he founded the Indians Overseas Association in London. He is an author, has been London correspondent to several Indian journals, and is a practising solicitor. From 1904-14 he was Gandhi's closest colleague and confidant, and his lieutenant in his long Passive Resistance struggle in South Africa. He was a pioneer of Gandhi's movement to end indentured-labour emigration from India.*

### CHAPTER I

#### PREPARING FOR LIFE

**M**OHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI, the youngest child of his parents, Karamchand and Putlibai, was born at Porbandar, Kathiawar, Western India, on 2 October, 1869. Being State-born he was not a British, but a British-protected, subject.

Many foreigners, recalling Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual leadership of the Indian nationalist movement for so many years, have supposed him to be a Brahmin. He was, in fact, a member of the Modh Bania sub-caste of the Vaisya caste, the third of the four great Hindu orders. Trade and agriculture are its traditional occupations. The family name indicates that the Gandhis were originally grocers and vendors of vegetable drugs. From his earliest years Gandhi was familiar with Indian village folk and their simple way of life, although his family had risen to high rank in state service. His grandfather,



Uttamchand, had been Chief Minister of the State of Porbandar. His father, Karamchand, was Chief Minister successively of Porbandar, Rajkot and Vankaner. He had thus in his blood two traits of the successful negotiator—a good head for business and the art of the public administrator familiar with the problems of statecraft and the handling of men. These aptitudes often came to his aid at critical moments of his public life. Indeed, when reproved for acting like a *bania*, or business man, by some of those who had failed to appreciate his subtle methods of devising a way out of a difficulty, he would smilingly admit pride in the fact. As will be seen presently, he acquired a third talent in negotiation by the practice of law.

His caste-origin and the circumstances and surroundings of his upbringing help one to understand more readily his characteristic distaste for all violence. Under the Hindu social system, each caste had a specific duty to the community. Ordinarily, only the Kshatriyas, or fighting-caste people, were concerned in practice with military service—somewhat in the same way that, in Europe of the Middle Ages, military service was restricted to the barons and their retainers. Other castes, like the Vaisyas, pursued peaceful paths. A second factor making violence abhorrent to Gandhi was the fact that the Vaishnava Hindus<sup>1</sup> of Western India, and especially those who, like his family, came strongly under Jain influence, held life so sacred that they were strict vegetarians, excluding from their diet even eggs, though not milk and its products. Moreover, both his parents had a long background of popular religious culture. Devoted to his father, Gandhi adored his mother. Her saintliness he venerated to the end. She had familiarized him, from his earliest days, with the practice of fasting and prayer for self-purification and the taking of religious vows as a method of self-discipline. He learnt from his nurse the practice of *Ramanama*—the repetition of the name of God, the Divine King—originally as a remedy against the fear of ghosts and spirits. He maintained it until the moment of his assassination as a regular means of entry to the Divine presence. He regarded the great epic, *Ramayana*, as one of his principal religious inheritances.

Even in his formative years, though he had moments of agnosticism and religious questioning, he had obtained a grounding in

<sup>1</sup> Followers of the cult of Vishnu.

religious tolerance. With his parents he visited the temples of the two main Hindu cults of Shiva and Vishnu, but he does not appear ever to have been attracted to temple-worship, nor was he ever in fact an orthodox Hindu. Jain monks paid frequent visits to the family house and discussed religious subjects. His father had Muslim and Parsi friends who talked of their own faiths in his hearing, thus preparing him for similar discussions with his non-Hindu countrymen when later he went to South Africa. It was at this period, as he said, that "Truth became my sole objective,"<sup>1</sup> as it remained, with an ever-widening definition, until the day of his passing. The return of good for evil was another doctrine which he eagerly absorbed.

His father had no schooling beyond the fifth Gujarati standard, and Gandhi describes him as having "no education," but he had shrewdness of judgment and the practical knowledge that comes from experience and observation. Gandhi's mother was unlettered. These were no peculiar phenomena among people of their class at that time. But their qualities of sturdy independence and practical common sense made a permanent impression upon him, and to the end of his life he was more intent upon character-building by self-discipline than upon academic education. But his parents, who had already come under the influence of the new outlook introduced by the Western education, wanted their son to acquire those qualifications which the new era needed, and he was sent to local high schools at Porbandar and Rajkot. As a student he was slow, hesitant and shy. Except for occasional dramas of a religious nature, his reading was almost wholly confined to his school books. His observance of truth was real and continuous, and the play *Harishchandra* made a deep impression on his sensitive mind. "Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?" I asked myself day and night," he records. "To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me." His utter devotion to truth as he understood it impelled him, in his *Autobiography*, to reveal much that a lesser devotee would have concealed regarding his earlier carnal tendencies and temptations. He was married (not

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations in Part I are taken from the *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, or from *Satyagraha in South Africa*, both by Gandhi.

merely betrothed) at the age of thirteen, according to family custom, to a girl slightly younger, named Kasturbai. His energetic condemnation of child-marriage, and of the modern use of contraceptives in place of self-restraint, dates from his early manhood, when he had already begun to realize their powerful place in the satisfaction of sensual desire. Gandhi has recorded that, though confident of their mutual fidelity, he was in earlier years a loving, yet jealous and autocratic, husband. He being of a naturally shy and reticent disposition, this may well have been an aspect of the inferiority complex which then assailed him. It provoked the natural reaction of revolt on Kasturbai's part. With the passage of time, Gandhi humorously remarked that he had his first and most memorable lessons in "passive resistance" from his wife. Such little literacy as she had, due to his occasional and admittedly insufficient teaching, was offset by devotion to duty and by strong common sense, which later served them both in good stead.

This early marriage interfered with his studies. Diffident as he was, much to his own astonishment he won prizes and scholarships, which he modestly attributed not so much to merit as to special conditions. He had no gift nor liking for good handwriting. This presently became a matter of regret to him, and he came to regard handwriting as a valuable discipline and a necessary part of literate education. Nor was he interested in sports, which he then held to be no part of education; but he took his exercise in long and brisk walks. These he continued until very late in life, and he attributed to them his hardy constitution. English and Sanskrit (his religious and classical language) came to him with difficulty; but having acquired a working knowledge of them, he found the first of great value when he subsequently went to England to study for the Bar. The second enabled him to take a deeper interest in, and to understand better, the Hindu sacred and classical books, especially the *Upanishads*, *Manusmriti* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, the last becoming his own most familiar and inspiring scripture. He was still a high-school student when a wave of "reform" swept over Rajkot, and Gandhi, whose adventurous spirit was already alert, soon came under its influence. As a result of unhappy family experience, he had begun to resent the affectation of superiority current among the English administrators. A school

friend persuaded him that the first step in reform was to become strong, like the English, who ate meat. Gandhi himself was something of a physical weakling and afraid of the dark. He and his people, he felt, must become as strong and courageous as the English, if India were to be free. Thus he began occasional meat-eating in secret. But this lapse was of brief duration; before very long the knowledge that he was lying to his parents began to gnaw at his heart, and accordingly he renounced his first attempt at "food reform." It was the same school friend who took him to a house of ill-fame; "but God in His infinite mercy protected me against myself." He has used this occasion to illustrate the difference between mere abstention and the overcoming of desire, a distinction emphasized strongly in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the *Autobiography*, Gandhi narrates other temptations, such as smoking, petty theft and even the thought of suicide, to which he fell victim in those early years. At last he confessed his faults in writing to his father (then on a bed of sickness), and his father's tears of agony and forgiveness gave him one of his earliest lessons in *ahimsa*, or non-violence, and the forgiveness of sin.

He was sixteen when his father died. Though a high officer of state, Karamchand had lived a very simple life. He had never accumulated wealth and left very little property. At eighteen Gandhi matriculated at Ahmedabad. A family friend persuaded his mother and elder brother, who had been maintaining him in circumstances of great financial difficulty, to send him to England, to become a barrister, with a view, in the changed conditions of life then manifesting themselves in public administration, to his ultimately succeeding his father as Dewan of Rajkot or Porbandar. With much hesitation, having heard stories of the temptations of life in the West, his mother consented, after a Jain monk had administered to him an oath and he had taken a vow not to touch wine, women or meat—a vow that he kept scrupulously under great and frequent temptation. But though he had the blessings of his elders, his caste-leaders refused their consent. He would be the first Modh Bania to go to England. When, determined upon the adventure, he refused to obey their injunctions to stay at home, he was declared outcaste, and he so remained in the view of the ultra-orthodox section of the caste until the

end of his life. With the help of a family friend, he sailed for England on 4 September, 1887.

After a few days' stay at an expensive London hotel, during which, for dietary reasons, he practically starved, Gandhi and an Indian friend took rooms together. He felt lonely and unhappy. He could share his misery with no one. The strangeness of everything, the fact that he could not get accustomed to English habits and that he must always be on guard, the inconvenience of his vegetarian vow, the insipidity of English dishes—all this created an inner strain which became almost unbearable. But having come to England for study, he could not think of returning to India.

His shyness and diffidence inhibited him from the beginning. On the steamer he had been scarcely able to enter into conversation with the British passengers who would have liked to befriend him. His social angularities decided him to polish his manners, to fit himself for polite society, and "to undertake the all-too-impossible task of becoming an English gentleman." He bought fashionable clothes, including a silk hat, and spent much time before a mirror arranging his tie and parting his hair. He took lessons in dancing, French and elocution. He soon gave up the first, as he could not understand Western musical rhythm. So he bought a violin and took lessons, in order to cultivate an ear for Western music. But presently an alarm-bell rang, and he decided that this was all a waste of time and effort. He must qualify for the Bar, and "if my character made a gentleman of me, so much the better. Otherwise I should forego the ambition."

A friend tried hard to persuade him to resort to meat. "But I was adamant. Daily I would pray for God's protection and get it. Not that I had any idea of God. It was faith that was at work." The friend, persisting in his attempt to induce Gandhi to change his mind, started an argument with him on the basis of Bentham's "Theory of Utility." Gandhi's final reply was: "I am helpless. A vow is a vow. It cannot be broken."

He wandered around London searching for a cheap vegetarian restaurant, where he could at least satisfy his hunger. After marching ten or twelve miles a day, he succeeded in his quest. A book that he discovered, Salt's *Plea for Vegetarianism*, greatly impressed him, and thereafter he became a vegetarian from choice and conviction, in

place of being a frustrated meat-eater who had taken a vow of abstinence. "I had all along abstained from meat in the interests of truth and of the vow (before my mother) which I had taken, but had wished at the same time that every Indian should be a meat-eater and had looked forward to being one myself freely and openly some day, and to enlist others in the cause. The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which henceforward became my mission." So began a new adventure. The vegetarian writers whose works he had studied had convinced him that, for ethical, spiritual, scientific, medical and economic reasons, vegetarianism had every advantage. He joined the London Vegetarian Society and presently became a member of its Executive Committee. He helped to design its badge, and his earliest public writings are to be found in its weekly paper, *The Vegetarian*. His shyness and difficulty of self-expression, however, prevented his saying anything at the committee meetings for some time. He could not even read a short written speech at a public meeting. Indeed, it was only in South Africa that he gradually (though never entirely) overcame his diffidence of speech in public. He always considered that his hesitation in speech taught him the value of economy of words, and he congratulated himself upon the fact that a thoughtless word hardly ever escaped his tongue or pen. "Experience has taught me that silence is part of the spiritual discipline of a votary of truth. . . . My shyness has been in reality a shield and a buckler."

A time came when he felt that he must make a stand on the question of principle. Much hostility within the Vegetarian Society had been directed against Dr. Allinson, also a member of its committee, because of his advocacy of artificial methods of birth-control. Gandhi agreed with the critics, but when they declined to re-elect Allinson to the committee, he opposed this on the ground that the objections had no direct connection with the purposes of the Society. He came prepared with a written speech, but could not find the courage to read it, and the President had it read by another member. As Allinson lost the day, Gandhi resigned from the committee. It is to be noted that he himself became a vigorous opponent, in later years, of artificial methods of birth-control, advocating self-control and continence. Dr. Oldfield persuaded him for a while to eat eggs, on the ground

that eggs were not meat and that no injury was done to any living thing. But conscience soon smote him, for he realized that, whatever might be the merits of the argument, he was, in fact, breaking the vow that he had made to his mother, whose own definition of meat included eggs. His decision once more limited his dietary and caused him fresh social embarrassment; but the simplification thereby caused and the adherence to his vow "produced an inward relish distinctly more healthy, delicate and permanent." The "golden rule" which he had deliberately chosen to follow was "to accept the interpretation honestly put on the pledge by the party administering it." All these dietary experiments were at first undertaken from the point of view of economy and hygiene. The spiritual aspect, the seed of which was already sown in England, grew to fruition in South Africa. In his own words, "a convert's enthusiasm for his new religion is greater than that of a person born in it." Full of zeal, he started a vegetarian club in Bayswater, where he then lived. Oldfield, then editor of *The Vegetarian*, was the President, Sir Edwin Arnold (author of *The Light of Asia* and *The Song Celestial*) was the Vice-President, and Gandhi was the Secretary. But in a short time he shifted his residence once more, and the club soon closed down. This small experience of organizing and conducting an institution gave him useful training and greater assurance, and it enabled him to give expression to his innate missionary spirit.

Limitation of funds compelled him to make every possible economy and, like a good *bania*, he kept an account of every farthing he spent, striking a balance every evening before retiring. "That habit has stayed with me ever since, and I know that as a result, though I have had to handle public funds amounting to lakhs, I have succeeded in exercising strict economy in their disbursement, and instead of outstanding debts have had invariably a surplus balance in respect of all the movements I have led. Let every youth take a leaf out of my book and make it a point to account for everything that comes into and goes out of his pocket, and like me he is sure to be a gainer in the end." He moved from place to place, according to the work he had to do, and he chose his residence always at least half an hour's walk from his place of activity. To this exercise, he used to say afterwards, he attributed his freedom from illness during his stay in England.

Like most Indian students, he maintained silence in England regarding his child-marriage, realizing that, among British people, students were considered—as in India's ancient days—unfit for marriage and under obligation to complete their training. Moreover, he found it embarrassing to avow his marriage, if he were to enjoy English social life. But presently he found that a lady friend was trying to arrange an engagement for him with another lady. Then he felt that he must dissemble no longer and wrote confessing that he was a husband and a father. He was fully forgiven by both ladies. From that time he never hesitated to talk of his married status whenever necessary. His vow to his mother, too, helped much to save him from temptation. It is interesting to note that, apart from his gentle eyes, he was by no means good-looking by Western standards, but throughout his life many notable women were greatly attracted by his personality, and he always had women friends, both British and Indian.

At first he had thought of graduating at Oxford or Cambridge before taking his law examinations, which he knew did not require much study. But this would have been beyond his means. So he studied without much additional expense for the London Matriculation. His study period proved to be too short, and he was "ploughed" in Latin. Undismayed, he continued his studies more intensively. He simplified his life still more, gave up his small suite, took a single room, invested in a stove, cooked his own breakfast, lunched out, and had bread and cocoa for supper—all at a cost of 1s. 3d. a day! "Plain living saved me plenty of time, and I passed my examination. . . . The change harmonized my outward and inward life. . . . My life was certainly more truthful and my soul knew no bounds of joy." It may here be noted that, contrary to general belief in the West, Gandhi never graduated.

Perhaps one of the most critical moments of this creative period was when, towards the end of his second year in England, he met two Theosophist brothers, who talked about the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*. They were reading *The Song Celestial*, Sir Edwin Arnold's verse rendering, and they asked Gandhi to read the Sanskrit original with them. To his shame, as he had read the scripture neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujerati (his mother tongue), he was



unable to help them. Together they studied the *Gita* in the original. But Arnold's translation he always regarded as the best of the many in the English language. He later declared that the *Gita* "was the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of the truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom." The description in the *Gita* of the "perfect man" was part of the Sanskrit recitation of his evening prayer-meetings later in life. He claimed, too, that the scripture justified his insistence upon complete non-violence in all circumstances. When it was pointed out to him that the Lord Krishna, addressing his pupil and devotee, Prince Arjuna, urged that he must play his part in the destruction of the enemy in lawful war, Gandhi's reply was that he regarded that instruction as not to be taken literally, but as being symbolic of the eternal conflict between good and evil, right and wrong, in the human soul. He did not reconcile this argument with Krishna's address to Arjuna as the *Kshatriya*, the soldier, whose duty is to defend the community, untouched by desire or fear; or with Krishna's reminder that, should Arjuna flinch from his natural duty, he would be deemed a coward, not only by his fellow-soldiers but by all who depended upon his courage and his devotion.

Among other books that the Theosophist brothers recommended to him was Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, from which Gandhi derived his first real understanding of the Buddhist teaching. They also took him to the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society, in Bayswater, and introduced him to Madame Blavatsky and her new disciple, Annie Besant. The controversy regarding the latter's conversion from atheism had greatly interested him. Another book to which his attention was drawn was Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*, which stimulated in him the desire to read books on his own religion, Hinduism, and which disabused him of hostile notions regarding it fostered by certain Rajkot Christian missionaries. The brothers advised him to join the Society, but he declined, on the ground that with his meagre knowledge of his religion he did not wish to belong to any religious body. Nevertheless, on 26 March, 1891, a few months before his return to India, he did become an associate member of the Lodge, though never a full member of the Society. He also met a number of Christian reformers, some of them vegetarians, from whom he learnt

much of the Biblical teachings. He was not attracted to the Pentateuch and does not appear to have been much influenced by the Psalms and the Prophets, if, indeed, he read them. But the New Testament, and the Sermon on the Mount in particular, made a very deep impression upon him. He compared it with the *Gita* and *The Light of Asia*. He sought to integrate them, deriving from them all the doctrine of the returning of good for evil and that of non-resistance. On one occasion he received Cardinal Newman's blessing. Later, some of his closest friends and helpers in South Africa were Christian ministers of different denominations, and above his office desk in Johannesburg, when he was still practising law, was a reproduction of a well-known picture of Jesus Christ. Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship* helped him to an understanding of the greatness, bravery and austerity of the Prophet of Islam. Nor had he failed, especially in the light of the Annie Besant controversy, to study Bradlaugh's agnostic teaching. Bradlaugh had been one of the strong supporters of the new Indian national movement derived from the recently inaugurated Indian National Congress. When he died, Gandhi and almost all the Indians then resident in London attended his funeral at Woking. Experiencing, as he did, many and frequent temptations during his stay in England, Gandhi came to realize the futility of mere religious knowledge. "I did not then know the essence of religion or of God, and how He works in us. . . . On all occasions of trial He has saved me. . . . In all my trials—of a spiritual nature, as a lawyer, in conducting institutions and in politics—I can say that God saved me."

He "kept terms" at the Inner Temple and after nine months' intensive study he took all his subjects in one examination, which he passed. He was called to the Bar on 10 June, 1891, and was enrolled in the High Court the next day. A day later, he sailed for home. It may here be recalled that when, after his imprisonment during his first civil disobedience movement in India, he was disbarred by his Inn, he would not apply thereafter for reinstatement, as he regarded himself as a farmer and a craftsman, who had renounced the profession of law deliberately many years before in South Africa.

Having passed his examinations, however, he was terrified at the prospect before him. "Notwithstanding my study," he says, "there

was no end to my helplessness and fear. I did not feel qualified to practise law." He had read the laws, but had not the slightest idea how to apply them. He knew nothing of the laws of his own country. He had no idea of Hindu or Mohammedan law. He could not draft a plaint. He was too shy to ask the advice or help of Dadabhai Naoroji, India's "Grand Old Man," then the leader of the Indian community in London. An English friend, familiar with Indian conditions, advised him not to worry because of the legal giants in India. He suggested a widening of Gandhi's general reading. A knowledge of the world and of human nature was vital for a *vakil* (attorney). He should be able to read a man's character from his face. He should know the history and customs of his own country. This advice, and a realization of his own honesty of purpose and his industry, gave Gandhi some encouragement, so that he arrived in India "with just a little leaven of hope mixed with my despair."

Stormy weather attending his landing in Bombay was symbolic of the storm within and the stresses to come. He was outcaste. He was a reformer eager to put his beliefs into practice. But the first blow came with the news, hitherto concealed from him, of his beloved mother's death. It seemed to shatter most of his cherished hopes. But his courage triumphed. He made new friends, of whom Raichandbhai—a business man, a poet and a spiritual devotee—became his guide and helper. His elder brother, who had maintained him while in England, had tried to prepare the way for a lucrative practice. He persuaded Gandhi to undergo a ceremonial purification at Nasik, gave a caste-dinner at Rajkot, and so secured Gandhi's readmission by a section of his caste-fellows. To the remainder, who still regarded him as unclean and refused to be socially contaminated by him, he adopted a non-resistant attitude. This resulted in relatively friendly relations even with those who still held him in ceremonial excommunication. With the restoration of family life, Gandhi had to confess his own shortcomings. He was still inclined to play the part of the jealous husband. But he devoted himself to his own and his brother's small children, teaching them physical exercises and giving them personal training. To the end of his life he loved to play with children. Food reforms followed naturally, and the male members of the joint household became Europeanized in dress and manner. Expenses, of

course, increased without any corresponding increase of the family income.

Lacking practical knowledge of the law, he returned to Bombay, to gain experience in the High Court. He did his own cooking, and continued his dietary experiments. But after a few months he was still without practice and was floundering in his studies of Indian legal procedure. Presently a small case was brought to him, for which he was told that he would have to pay a commission to a tout. He firmly refused; but he retained the client and attended the Small Causes Court on her behalf. When, however, he rose to cross-examine the plaintiff's witnesses, his courage failed him, he sat down without uttering a word, and he asked another lawyer to take over the case. He never again appeared in Court in India on behalf of a client. He tried unsuccessfully to get a teaching appointment. Before returning to Kathiawar, he realized that he was best qualified as a draftsman of memorials and legal documents. His brother, himself a petty pleader, agreed that he should return and practise at Rajkot. The drafting of documents brought him a small regular income, from which he had to pay the customary proportion to the lawyers who sent him this work. Maintenance from the joint family purse helped to balance these disbursements.

Then occurred an event which made a permanent mark upon his life and gave him an insight into Indo-British relations then prevalent at the official level. His brother had been secretary and adviser to the late Rana of Porbandar before the latter's installation. The charge of having given wrong advice hung over him. The matter had gone to the Political Agent, who was prejudiced against him. Gandhi had known this official when in England and had found him fairly friendly. His brother persuaded him, against his will, to call on the official and try to put in a good word for him. The interview was an unhappy one. The official, assuming that Gandhi, in the spirit of the intrigues rife in Kathiawar, was trying to take advantage of the earlier acquaintance, rudely addressed him, refused to listen to his explanation, ordered him to leave at once, and, when Gandhi tried to explain, ordered his servant to put the persistent fellow out of the room. In an angry mood, deeply humiliated by this arrogant treatment, Gandhi sent a written protest and threatened proceedings if

## EARLY YEARS

amends were not made. The answer was that Gandhi had himself shown discourtesy in disobeying the *sahib's* orders, leaving him no option but to have him removed from the office. Gandhi was at liberty to take such proceedings as he wished. He was advised by friends to pocket the insult, as so many other Indians had had to do at the hands of British officials. If not, he would ruin his professional prospects. He accepted the advice, but "this shock changed the course of my life." Recognizing that he himself had been to blame for having undertaken this distasteful mission, he nevertheless resented the arrogance of the official concerned, in whose Court most of his professional work would lie. In that atmosphere, saturated with intrigue, he could not possibly succeed. Even as regards administrative matters, on which representations had to be made, he found the Indian official to be even more discourteous than his English colleague.

It was in this mood of exasperation that he received an offer from an Indian firm in Porbandar to go to South Africa to instruct counsel already retained concerning the details of a large claim against another Indian firm, then pending in the Court of the South African Republic, and to help in the preparation of the case. The offer of a fee of a hundred guineas, first-class return fare and all expenses paid, was promptly accepted by the young barrister, suffering from frustration both personally and professionally. He was eager for a new adventure, which would enable him to relieve his brother's finances. "In April, 1893, I set forth full of zeal to try my luck in South Africa." After firmly resisting the many temptations at the ports of call, Gandhi arrived at Durban a month later. So began a period fraught with happenings which helped to mould one of the greatest personalities of our times.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT GANDHI FOUND IN SOUTH AFRICA

**T**HE INTRODUCTION of Indians into Natal, whence, in course of time, a few thousands drifted into the other parts of what is now the Union of South Africa, was originally the work of the white colonists, who at that time numbered some seven thousand. Finding native Africans unsuited to the work of sugar estates and other agricultural projects then under development, and thus faced with bankruptcy, they had approached the British Government to get more dependable labour from India. The Government of India, aware that when Natal became part of Cape Colony in 1844 it had been laid down that "there shall not be in the eye of the Law any distinction or disqualification whatever founded on mere distinction of colour, origin, language, or creed, but the protection of the Law in letter and in substance shall be extended impartially to all alike," had given their consent, and the introduction of indentured labour began in 1860.

In 1869, the Government of India stopped recruitment as a result of the unsatisfactory conditions which obtained in the Colony. Under economic pressure, the Natal Government renewed their request, and an agreement was reached between the two governments whereby Indian immigrants were promised free return passages to India, or grants of land in lieu thereof if they wished to settle in the Colony after the expiry of their five-year contracts. Another integral part of the agreement was that the labourers should enjoy equality of status after the period of indenture, and that they should live under the ordinary law of the land and not be subject to legislative or administrative discrimination. This was expressly laid down in the Government of India's declaration to the Natal Government: "We cannot permit emigration to be resumed until we are satisfied that the

Colonial authorities are awake to their duty towards Indian immigrants, and that effective measures have been taken to ensure to that class of Her Majesty's subjects full protection in Natal." Indian emigration to Natal was accordingly resumed in 1874. Following these emigrants, and with the encouragement of the Natal authorities, who realized that the labourers needed their help, Indian traders (originally from Mauritius and later from Western India) and their clerical assistants arrived in the Colony, settling mainly in the urban areas.

When Gandhi arrived, in 1893, he found a relatively large Indian population, who were mostly estate labourers and workers on the railways and in the coal-mines. The labourers were mainly from the Madras Presidency, speaking Tamil and Telugu, and from Bihar, speaking Hindi. They were Hindus and Muslims, with many Christians, mostly born in the Colony. The traders were Gujarati speakers, almost all Muslims, their clerks Hindus and Parsees. Thus, among the Indians themselves, wide social differences existed. The merchants had some social contacts with their Hindu and Parsee clerks, but none of these had dealings with the indentured and freed labourers. Most of the hotel waiters were Indian Christians, of indentured origin, who wore English costume, as did the clerks. The Muslims dressed according to Indian custom and called themselves Arabs, for self-protection. The Europeans addressed or referred contemptuously to Indians indiscriminately as "coolies" or "sammies" (many South Indian names ending in *sami* or *swami*).

Soon after his landing, Gandhi, dressed as usual in European clothes but wearing a Bengali professional turban, attended the Durban Magistrate's Court. The Magistrate, however, observing that he was not dressed in Muslim costume, asked him to remove his turban, but he refused to do so, and left the Court. He wrote to the Press on the incident, defending the wearing of the turban in Court. The result was that the Press described him as an "unwelcome visitor," but he received some unexpected publicity and a certain amount of private sympathy. He continued to wear the turban, except in Court, almost until the end of his stay in South Africa.

A week after this episode he went to Pretoria, the capital of the South African Republic of the Transvaal, in order to consult the local lawyers in charge of his client's case. Before leaving, he

informed the client, much to the latter's surprise, that he would try, if possible, to get the case settled out of court. This, in fact, he did, with the lawyers' consent, on terms satisfactory to both parties and with the saving of considerable legal expense. The result was an agreeable surprise not only to them but to the Indian community generally, with whom Gandhi's reputation as a sage and disinterested counsellor rose high. "My joy was boundless. I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder. The lesson was so indelibly burnt into me that a large part of my time during the twenty years of my practice as a lawyer was occupied in bringing about private compromises of hundreds of cases. I lost nothing thereby—not even money, certainly not my soul."

On his way to Pretoria he had learnt what it was to be a coloured non-European in South Africa. At the instance of a European passenger, he was forcibly removed from the first-class compartment of the train and left to shiver on the platform all night. Tempted at first to return immediately to India, he determined later to attempt to root out the prevalent disease of colour-prejudice, though he might suffer in the process. With the help of Indian friends he secured a reservation on another train to his destination. From there he proceeded to Johannesburg by stage-coach. He was segregated from the white passengers, given an inferior seat, violently assaulted by the conductor because he refused to change his seat again, and saved from further violence only by the intervention of some of the white passengers. After written protest to the agent at the intermediate stopping place, he secured a seat to Johannesburg with the other passengers. At the hotel *en route* he was refused accommodation because of his race and colour. The guard of the train from Johannesburg to Pretoria, for which he held a first-class ticket, ordered him to remove to a third-class coach, and only desisted from forcibly removing him, the "coolie," because his European fellow-passengers protested. When he related his experiences, his compatriots told him that they had suffered still worse treatment, but that they had endured the insults and humiliations because otherwise they could not have carried on their trade. Among other things, he learnt that the Trans-



vaal *Grondwet*, or Fundamental Law, expressly declared that no equality, either in the Church or in the State, could exist between white and coloured people.

Within a few days of his arrival in Pretoria he called a meeting of the Indian community. In the first public speech of his life, he addressed the audience with courage and conviction, presenting to them a picture of their true condition in the Transvaal. In doing so, he did not fail to point out to the Indian leaders his countrymen's weaknesses, insisting upon their observance of truthfulness in business and sanitary habits in their domestic life, if they would avoid justifiable criticism. He urged the need of communal unity, irrespective of religious, sectional, or economic differences; failing unity, they could not hope to improve their lot, safeguard their interests, preserve their self-respect, or maintain the honour of their country. As a result of his appeal, an association was formed to represent Indian grievances to the proper authorities, British and Boer. Further inquiry revealed the cruel manner in which Indians had been almost completely driven out of the other Boer Republic, the Orange Free State, as early as 1888. The few who remained were a handful of despised hotel-waiters.

Gandhi's short stay in Pretoria had enabled him to make a fairly thorough study of the conditions of Indians in the two Republics. In the Transvaal, the situation was governed by Law 3 of 1885, as amended in 1886, requiring all Indians to register and to pay a poll-tax of £3 on entry; withholding from them the franchise; and denying them the right to own land or buildings except in locations set aside for them in insanitary and neglected areas. Section 1 of this offensive measure was applied to "the native races of Asia, including the so-called Coolies, Arabs, Malays and Mohammedan subjects of the Turkish Dominion." To the day of his final departure from South Africa, Gandhi as an Asiatic, notwithstanding his professional status, could not legally own the house in which he lived in Johannesburg or the premises in which he had his law office. There has been no change in this segregation law. In addition, Asiatics were subject to general laws affecting Africans and other coloured people, such as prohibition of the use of public footpaths and of remaining out of doors after 9 p.m. A few Indian traders were excepted as a matter of special

privilege. On at least one occasion, when walking on the footpath outside President Kruger's unpretentious house in Pretoria, Gandhi was violently pushed and kicked into the road by a watchman. Though he could have produced a friendly European witness who had intervened to prevent further assault, he refused to take action against the offender. "What does the poor man know?" he asked his friend. "All coloured people are the same to him. He no doubt treats Negroes just as he has treated me. I have made it a rule not to go to court in respect of any personal grievance. So I do not intend to proceed against him." He maintained this rule throughout his stay in the country. But he had already realized that South Africa, in its then attitude to coloured folk, was no place for a self-respecting Indian, and his mind was increasingly occupied with the best way of improving this state of things.

After settling the law case, Gandhi returned to Durban to prepare for his departure for India. Chancing, however, at a farewell party given in his honour, to glance at a newspaper headline, he noticed a reference to a Bill then before the Natal Legislature, which sought to deprive Indians, who then enjoyed the franchise, of their right to elect members of the Assembly. No one present seemed to be aware of this measure. The leaders at once urged him to remain a little longer in order to help to fight it. He agreed to stay another month to make preparations to oppose the Bill, but he refused to accept any fees for his public work. Of this he made a principle throughout his South African period. The party was turned into a working committee. "Thus God laid the foundations of my life in South Africa and sowed the seed of the fight for national self-respect." Volunteers, including Natal-born Indians, mostly Christians, hitherto excluded from public activity because of their lowly origin, were enrolled. Distinctions of all kinds were forgotten in the face of the impending danger and in the recognition that "all were alike children and servants of the Motherland." Telegrams were addressed to the Speaker and the Premier, requesting postponement of further discussion of the Bill, pending the presentation of a widely signed petition of protest. Though the petition created some impression upon the Assembly, the Bill was nevertheless passed. The Indian community, encouraged by Gandhi's devoted leadership, were undismayed by this

rebuff and determined to continue the fight for their political rights. It was decided to send a further petition, drafted by Gandhi, to Lord Ripon, then Secretary of State for the Colonies. Ten thousand signatures were obtained throughout the Colony in a fortnight—no light task in those days—and the petition was duly submitted, copies being sent to London and India for publication. It was the first occasion that the Indian public were made acquainted with conditions in Natal. Both the Indian and the British Press strongly supported the appeal to the British Government to veto the Bill. In its then form of open racialism the Royal assent was withheld. But when the measure was amended so that those who did not enjoy the franchise in their country of origin were ineligible to exercise it in Natal in future, the Home Government, being unwilling to interfere with the Colony's recently acquired right of self-government, even though they did not approve of its action, declined to recommend the veto. The Natal Indians, save those already on the register of voters, thus lost the franchise, but they were not, of course, exempted from taxation as some measure of compensation; nor, when the franchise in India was widely extended from 1909 onwards, was the Natal Indian vote restored.

Gandhi had now realized that he could no longer contemplate an early return to India. To enable him to remain in South Africa, the Indian leaders undertook to help him in his legal practice, so that he might carry out his desire to devote his major activities to the service of the Indian community. He accordingly applied for admission as an advocate of the Supreme Court. The Attorney-General consented to present his application, but the Law Society lodged an objection based on race and colour considerations. The Chief Justice, however, ruled out the objection and ordered Gandhi's admission.

It was in connexion with this struggle for recognition of Indian rights that Gandhi composed his first direct appeal to South African opinion in a pamphlet entitled *The Indian Franchise: an Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa*. He felt that he should not only summarize the history of his people in South Africa and correct misunderstandings arising from forgetfulness of the Indian contribution to the economic life of the Colony, but that he should also give a brief survey of the Indian cultural background, evidently unknown to the

## WHAT GANDHI FOUND IN SOUTH AFRICA

white population. In a covering letter addressed to prominent Europeans he wrote:

“Whether you be a clergyman, editor, public man, merchant or lawyer, the subject cannot but demand your attention. If you are a clergyman, inasmuch as you represent the teaching of Jesus, it must be your duty to see that you are in no way directly or indirectly countenancing the treatment of your fellow-beings that would not be pleasing to Jesus. If you are an editor of a newspaper, the responsibility is equally great. Whether you are using your influence as a journalist to the evolution or degradation of humanity will depend upon whether you are encouraging division among class and class or striving after union. The same remarks will apply to you as a public man. If you are a merchant or a lawyer, you have then, too, a duty to discharge to your customers and clients, from whom you derive a considerable pecuniary advantage. It is for you to treat them as dogs or fellow-beings demanding your sympathy in the cruel persecution that they are put to owing to the prevalent ignorance about Indians in the Colony.”

On 22 May, 1894, the Natal Indian Congress was formed. Gandhi, who throughout his South African career sought only the opportunity for the hardest service, became its secretary. He insisted from the beginning that the organization should be solvent. Another body, formed under the auspices of the Congress, was the colonial-born Indian Education Association, which helped to bridge the gulf hitherto existing between the mercantile and the ex-indentured and more Europeanized sections of the community. But his work for the Congress did not satisfy Gandhi's craving for service. The indentured labourers were still outside the pale of membership, largely owing to their poverty and backwardness. One day one of them came to Gandhi's office in utter distress. He had been severely beaten by his master and his head was covered with blood. Gandhi took up the case, studied the indenture laws, and learnt that an indentured labourer had no choice of employer, nor had he freedom to change his occupation. Whilst an ordinary servant who left service without giving notice was liable to be sued in a civil court, an indentured labourer doing so would have been guilty of a criminal offence.

Gandhi sought the help of the Protector of Indian Immigrants to have the injured man's services transferred to another employer, and he was satisfied to have the offending employer's case before the Magistrate settled by a record of conviction for assault, without further penalty. The incident soon became known to the indentured labourers at large, and Gandhi came to be regarded as their friend and adviser in time of need. The fact that they had someone to espouse their cause gave them new hope.

The substantial increase in the numbers of ex-indentured Indians had created a fear lest a large Indian population should grow up independent of the now affluent white employers. Since their arrival in the Colony, many Indians had become growers of fruit and vegetables, including new varieties from India. Others had become small traders, and some of these had become owners of land and buildings. The white employers had not reckoned with their skill and shrewdness, which led to formidable business competition. Hostility grew among the white population, further aggravated by the Indians' different ways of living, strange religious customs, often insanitary habits, and contentment with small gains. It was, therefore, proposed to send back to India labourers whose indentures had expired, unless they were willing to re-indenture every two years or, if they remained "free" in the Colony, to pay an annual poll tax of £25. After a reference to the Viceroy of India, who unfortunately agreed in principle, the proposed tax was reduced to £3. This meant that an ex-indentured labourer, out of a meagre income, had to pay an annual levy of £12 for himself, his wife, his male child of sixteen, and his female child of thirteen. Though the fight of Gandhi and the Congress had only partially succeeded, it had determined the Indian community to continue to oppose the poll tax until its final repeal at some future time. It took, however, another twenty years before a convenient opportunity occurred.

Because of his professional and political activities, in which his sincerity of purpose and his personal modesty became increasingly recognized, a number of liberal Europeans, uninfluenced by racial prejudice, were drawn to him. Among them were missionaries and other Christian friends anxious to convert him to their faith. But he felt that he knew so little of his own and its cultural background that

it would be improper to make such a fundamental change. His reading, accordingly, widened. Among the books that greatly influenced him at this time were Max Müller's *India: What Can It Teach Us?* and the *Upanishads*, which greatly enhanced his regard for Hinduism, whose beauties began to grow upon him. His studies of other religions, in his search for spiritual truth, introduced him to Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomet and His Successors*, and *The Sayings of Zoroaster*. It was at this time, too, that he read some of Tolstoy's religious and ethical works. These and other books made a deep impression upon him.

It was now three years since Gandhi had arrived in Natal, and as he realized that he must prolong his stay if he were to complete his work for the Indian community, he decided to return to India to fetch his family. He also felt that the Indian public must be much better informed of the disabilities prevalent in South Africa. In 1896, therefore, he took ship to Calcutta. On his way from Calcutta to Bombay he missed the train at Allahabad and seized the opportunity of interviewing the editor of the *Pioneer*. "This unexpected interview . . . laid the foundation of the series of incidents which ultimately led to my being nearly lynched in Natal." Arriving at Rajkot, he busied himself writing the historic "Green Pamphlet," in which he drew a purposely subdued picture of the condition of the South African Indians. A distorted report of this was cabled to Durban, and every Indian paper of note commented at length on the question.

Fear of the spread of plague to Rajkot from Bombay caused Gandhi to offer his services to the sanitary department of the Rajkot State. He was put on a committee to examine the situation in the city, and he at once emphasized the need for clean latrines. These were in a filthy condition, as much with the rich as with the poor. The poor carried out improvements Gandhi advised, but the wealthier citizens resisted. In the course of his activities Gandhi visited the Untouchables' quarters, which, he found to his surprise, were well kept and clean. By contrast, the surroundings of the Vaishnava temple were filthy. Gandhi was horrified, for he was aware that the Hindu scriptures had "laid the greatest emphasis on cleanliness, both inward and outward." It was these early first-hand experiences that led him thereafter to insist upon sanitary cleanliness in his own household. He

used to cleanse the lavatories himself, and later at his "simple life" settlements he made practical experiments to ensure the health of the residents. Hence the affectionate title of *Mahabhangi*<sup>1</sup> conferred upon him by one of his English colleagues in South Africa.

One great passion of his life at this time was his loyalty to the British constitution. He thought that the colour prejudice that he had seen in South Africa was contrary to British traditions, which he always invoked. His devotion to the Throne led him to join the committee appointed at Rajkot to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Deep-rooted, too, was his love of nursing the sick, to which he devoted himself, at great personal risk, on many occasions, as will be seen later. "My aptitude for nursing gradually developed into a passion, so much so that it often led me to neglect my work. . . ."

His immediate political mission drew him to consult Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, the "Lion of Bombay," who, after listening to Gandhi's story, agreed to call a public meeting—the first to be held in India on the South African question. Gandhi was exhausted by watching at the death-bed of a near relative, his voice failed him, and his written speech—upon which Mehta had insisted—was read for him by D. E. Wacha, another Bombay celebrity. From Bombay he proceeded to Poona and Madras. At Poona he won the support of B. G. Tilak. Here, too, he first met G. K. Gokhale, who to the end of his life, in 1915, remained Gandhi's political *guru* (teacher). The public meeting there was a great success. At Madras also his meeting raised him greatly in public esteem and brought him many friends. Thence he returned to Calcutta, where Surendranath Banerji extended his warm sympathy, and the British newspapers of the city gave the question wide publicity. A column-long letter, signed M. K. Gandhi, setting forth the fundamentals of the South African situation, and asking for the strong support of the European community in India, appeared in the *Englishman* (Calcutta) of 14 November, 1896. But while canvassing the possibilities of a meeting, he received an urgent cable from Durban summoning him back, as the Legislature was reopening shortly. Accordingly, he sailed with his family for South Africa. Another vessel and his own sailed together, carrying some eight hundred passengers, and reached Durban on 18 December.

<sup>1</sup> *Mahabhangi*: great, or chief, scavenger.



*M. K. Gandhi, South Africa, 1904*





*Gandhi and Kasturba, 1906*

### CHAPTER III

#### STORM AND STRESS

UPON THE pretext of the outbreak of plague in Bombay, the Natal port authorities held the ships in quarantine for some days. The true reason was that the white colonists were agitating for the repatriation of Gandhi and his fellow-passengers, whom he was falsely accused of having brought with him as part of a plot to swamp the Europeans. In fact, until the voyage began, he had known none of them, except a couple of relatives who had travelled with him and his family. Most of the passengers, in any case, were proceeding to the Transvaal and not remaining in Natal. Another accusation was that, while in India, he had indulged in wild accusations against the white colonists; whereas, in fact, he had spoken and written in India more guardedly in condemnation of Natal's anti-Indian policy than he had done in the Colony itself. He was warned of the danger awaiting him and the other passengers if they did not return at once to India, but they were determined not to yield to threats of violence. Gandhi's view was that his white opponents were ignorant and narrow in their hostility, but they were sincere, and he could not, therefore, be angry with them. At last he and his companions received an ultimatum to submit, if they would escape with their lives. In reply, they maintained their right to land in Natal at any risk. Orders were thereupon issued permitting them to land.

The Prime Minister sent a private warning to Gandhi that, in view of the anger of the whites and of the danger to his life, he and his family should land after dark. The shipping company's lawyer came aboard and offered to escort Gandhi ashore, while his family went ahead to their Indian host, Parsee Rustumjee. It would, he said, be a matter of humiliation if Gandhi landed in the dark. He should enter the city openly, not by stealth. In any case, the white extremists had

dispersed and all was quiet. Gandhi accepted this well-meant advice; but he and his friend had scarcely landed when he was recognized and violently assaulted by some hooligans in waiting. He was rescued just in time by the wife of the Police Superintendent, who knew him and happened to be passing. She stood between him and the mob with her umbrella open to protect him against blows and missiles. News of the attack soon brought the Superintendent himself, with a posse of police, who escorted him safely to his destination. But the danger was not over. An angry crowd surrounded the house, shouting: "We must have Gandhi!" "Hang old Gandhi to the crab-apple tree!" The Superintendent urged him to save his family, and the house and property of his host, by escaping in disguise. He left the house dressed as an Indian constable, in the company of two detectives disguised as Indians. News of the escape was given to the mob when he had safely reached the police station. After a search of the house, the mob dispersed quietly, thanks to the Superintendent's tactful handling of a dangerous situation.

When the news of the attack reached London, Joseph Chamberlain, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, cabled asking the Natal Government to prosecute Gandhi's assailants. The Natal Premier sent for Gandhi to express his apologies and to convey this message. Gandhi, whilst strongly blaming the Natal Government for not having informed the public of the true facts and for allowing the crowd to get out of hand, declined his consent to the prosecution of people who had acted from ignorance under irresponsible guidance. He put this in writing, at the Minister's request, for Chamberlain's information, and was thanked by the Premier. The local Press interviewed him, and he showed, by reference to his written speeches in India, that he had expressed himself there moderately and objectively. He showed also beyond doubt that he had no hand in bringing any of his fellow-passengers except his own family. The Press then admitted his innocence and condemned the mob. The episode enhanced the Indian community's prestige, made Gandhi's public work easier and helped him professionally. But indirectly it increased racial prejudice. Fresh anti-Indian legislation, affecting trading rights and immigration, was shortly afterwards passed. As the measures were, in form, not based upon discrimination in race and colour, when the British Colonial

Secretary was appealed to he declined to interfere, though it was known that their administration would be directed against the Indians. Following the precedent of the amended Franchise Bill these measures, too, became law.

Having set up his household in a pleasant suburb and directed that his children should dress and behave according to English custom, Gandhi's next problem was their education. European schools were unsatisfactory, as the children could be admitted only as a favour, and he was disinclined to send them to the missionary schools. He engaged an English governess and himself gave the children lessons in their mother tongue, Gujerati. He was dissatisfied with the result, as he could give too little personal attention to their education owing to his public and professional commitments. But he felt that home life was an essential background; that "the child never learns in after-life what it does in its first five years" from its parents; and that, even if it were otherwise defective, the best education was always from the school of experience. As regards his eldest son, lack of higher education remained throughout a barrier between child and father.

The yearning to undertake nursing led him to place himself, in his spare time, under Dr. Booth, head of a Christian mission, who had taken charge of a charitable hospital opened by Parsee Rustomjee. Gandhi acted as compounder in the dispensary. The work brought him into close contact with Indian patients, mostly indentured or ex-indentured labourers, whose complaints he ascertained and brought to the doctor's knowledge, and to whom he dispensed the prescriptions. He profited by this experience to effect the safe delivery of his youngest child, in the unavoidable absence of doctor and nurse. It was at this time, too, that he began to think seriously of taking the *brāhmacharya* (continence) vow, though it was not until 1906 that he actually did so. In order to prepare himself for it, he began to simplify life, in dietary and other matters, thus reducing household expenditure. He washed much of his own laundry and learnt to cut his own hair. The laughter of friends did not deter him from his experiments in austerity.

It was in this stage of his spiritual development that the South African War came to complete his maturity. He felt that the Indian

community, having stressed its pride in British citizenship, exercised its limited rights as British subjects, and demanded equal treatment, must recognize its responsibilities in the crisis. If it did not, it would be at fault and would deserve the severe treatment that would inevitably follow. Though, in view of their unhappy lot in South Africa, many of his countrymen held other views, he finally persuaded the community to accept his advice to help actively in the war, even though it were only to do sweepers' or scavengers' work in the hospitals for the wounded. After much delay, the British military authorities accepted the Indian offer, and sanction was given for the formation of an Indian Ambulance Corps. It numbered some 1,100 men, free, ex-indentured and even indentured volunteers. Gandhi himself served as its effective leader under his old friend, Dr. Booth.

The Indian Ambulance Corps worked side by side with a European corps, many of whose members had been active anti-Indians. Their relations became increasingly friendly. Though the Indian offer had been for any service, however dangerous, the letter of acceptance granted the Indian corps immunity from service in the firing line. At the beginning, therefore, the permanent Army ambulance units carried the dying and the wounded from the firing line to safety, and they were then picked up by the voluntary units, which carried them to the base hospitals, sometimes twenty-five miles from the battle areas. The work was very arduous, as in the early stages British losses were heavy. Eventually, the need was so great that the condition excluding the Indians from the firing line was waived, with their glad consent. One historic event remained in Gandhi's memory. When Lieutenant Roberts, the son of the Field-Marshal, was mortally wounded, it was the Indian corps that carried his body from the battlefield. Two months later, as guerilla warfare developed, the two volunteer ambulance corps were disbanded, with an intimation that, in case of need, their services would again be used. The work of the Indian corps was mentioned in dispatches, and the thirty-seven Indian leaders, including Gandhi, received war medals. The friendly feeling engendered among the white colonists by the Indians' unexpected offer, and by the courage that the volunteers had shown, had greatly enhanced the community's prestige.

Upon his release from service, Gandhi continued his civilian

public duties, one of the most important of which was to persuade his countrymen to meet the charge of slovenly habits and indifference to the cleanliness of their houses and surroundings. A plague outbreak in Durban was feared, and house-to-house visits were made, at the request of the city fathers, asking for Indian cooperation in preventative measures. As in India, Gandhi found less response and more opposition from the middle-class folk than from the workers. Nevertheless, he obtained a definite measure of success in persuading his people that, when in Rome, they should live as the Romans. "... the result of this agitation was that the Indian community learnt to recognize, more or less, the necessity of keeping their houses and environments clean. I gained the esteem of the authorities. They saw that, though I had made it my business to ventilate grievances and press for rights, I was no less keen and insistent upon self-purification."

One other matter close to his heart was that his countrymen, many of whom had gone to South Africa primarily for trade and material benefits (as had, of course, the white colonists), should remember their Indian Motherland. So, when the terrible famines of 1897 and 1899 occurred in India, the Indian traders contributed handsomely to the famine relief funds. Even the indentured labourers gave of their poverty, and many European sympathizers subscribed generously. "Thus service of the Indians in South Africa ever revealed to me new implications of truth at every stage. Truth is like a vast tree, which yields more and more fruit the more you nurture it. The deeper the search in the mine of truth, the richer the discovery of the gems buried there, in the shape of openings for an ever-greater variety of service."

Gandhi now decided that he had finished his task in South Africa, and he asked the community to relieve him so that he might finally return to India. His colleagues agreed, upon the condition that he should return to Natal if, within a year, the community should need him. This condition, though a hard one, he accepted. His clients and friends loaded him with gifts of money and jewellery. But after reflection he felt it impossible to accept these, and with the utmost difficulty he induced Mrs. Gandhi, who was naturally interested in the material welfare of her children, to consent to his returning the gifts to be used as a trust fund for public purposes. So he and his

family sailed for India, towards the end of 1901, in the hope and expectation of being able to devote himself henceforth to public service in the Motherland on behalf of the Indians in South Africa.

He arrived in time to prepare for the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. But while he gained the respect of many of the leaders for his singleness of purpose and willingness to undertake even the humblest tasks, he was not greatly impressed by the arrangements made for the three days' session. Among other things to which he devoted himself personally was the cleansing and sanitation of the residential section, which had been much neglected. Another matter that caused him some surprise was the aloofness with which the delegates, of different communal, provincial, language and caste origins, regarded each other. Gokhale, shortly to become the Founder-President of the Servants of India Society, and already very prominent among the Congress leaders, virtually adopted Gandhi as a younger brother, helped to make him feel more at home in his new surroundings, and introduced him to other leading congressmen. When, however, the time came to make his brief speech on the South African resolution which he had drafted, his old hesitancy returned. But the resolution was carried unanimously, to his great joy, for it meant to him that the country had given its *imprimatur* to a good cause.

After the Congress session he stayed on in Calcutta as Gokhale's guest for a month, and thus had ample opportunities to observe the latter's devotion to the public good, to the exclusion of all other interests. In his turn, Gokhale was deeply impressed with Gandhi's simple habits and single-minded desire to serve the country. Gandhi took in much of what was going on in the then capital of India, and noted many things that caused him much distress. He was, for example, unpleasantly surprised to find how deeply subservient the Indian aristocracy had become to the ceremonialism of high officialdom. The blood-sacrifices at the Kali Temple horrified him. The sturdy beggars expecting alms, without rendering service in return, disgusted him. These things led him to study the reformist teachings of the *Brahmo Samaj*. After a brief visit to Rangoon, where the freedom and energy of the Burmese women, by contrast with the lassitude and indifference of the men, greatly impressed him, he

returned to Calcutta to take leave of Gokhale. He wanted to make a tour of Upper India, travelling third class, to see what the common people had to endure during their travels. He stayed at night in pilgrim hostels, and the journey back to Rajkot cost him little more than thirty rupees, including fares. But he was thoroughly disgusted with the experience, and contrasted the filth and hardships of Indian third-class travel with the much more comfortable travel provided for the Negroes of South Africa. For much of this he held his own countrymen to blame, though he held the indifference of the railway authorities also partly responsible. At Benares he underwent ceremonial purification in the Ganges, but was much distressed by the uncleanness of the surroundings of the Kashi Vishvanath temple, where he went for blessing. He was deeply impressed by the hypocrisy and irreligion surrounding the holy places.

Gokhale had wished him to settle in practice in Bombay, to help him in his public work. But Gandhi was yet unsure of himself professionally, and thought that he should see first if he could make good at Rajkot. So successful did he prove in chamber work that his colleagues at last felt that he was wasting time and opportunities, and promised their support if he went to practise in Bombay.

He had hardly done so when his second son, Manilal, developed serious illness. The doctor professed to be unable to do anything for the boy unless he changed his vegetarian dietary and took eggs and chicken broth. The distressed father, with the boy's consent, decided to give him the Kuhne hydropathic treatment, which he had studied for some time. In spite of the protests of relatives, who urged that an Ayurvedic practitioner should be called in, Gandhi persisted, firm in his belief that, God willing, the boy would recover under the new treatment. His faith was justified.

He prospered professionally, with the support of some former South African clients and others who had confidence in him. Gokhale, who had high hopes of him, kept in constant touch. "But . . . God has never allowed any of my own plans to stand. He has disposed of them in His own way." Just as he had seemed to be settling down as he had intended, an urgent cable summoned him back to South Africa. Chamberlain was expected there almost immediately in connexion with the post-war settlement. True to his pledge, Gandhi



made immediate arrangements to start for South Africa. As he did not expect to remain there for more than a few months, he left his family behind. "I think it is wrong to expect certainties in this world, where all else but God that is Truth is an uncertainty...." He arrived in Durban towards the end of 1902.

Shortly after Gandhi's return, Chamberlain arrived in Natal. An Indian deputation waited upon him, with Gandhi, who had drafted its memorandum, as its principal spokesman. It protested strongly against the disabilities imposed upon the Natal Indians. Chamberlain admitted the genuineness of their grievances, and promised to do what he could to get redress. But he added that the Indians should do their best to placate the Europeans, and emphasized, too, that the Imperial Government had little control over self-governing colonies. Gandhi and his colleagues were greatly cast down by this reply. His own reaction to the Colonial Secretary's warning was: "He had brought home to us... the rule of might being right, or the law of the sword." This was not the only occasion when, labouring under deep and natural disappointment at the failure to secure the removal of humiliating disabilities, Gandhi failed to apprehend the inherent quality of constitutional relations between Britain and the self-governing colonies (later called Dominions), to whose autonomous status India was already aspiring. Once the period of dependent minority was ended and that of responsible majority was attained, the autonomous unit had the freedom of choice of right or of wrong action, with all the attendant consequences. This it was which made the Imperial Government, even though protective powers had been reserved in the self-governing constitutions regarding minorities or unenfranchised sections of the population, increasingly hesitant to interfere.

But if this were the position in Natal, it was far otherwise in the newly conquered Transvaal, now a Crown Colony under the direct control of the Colonial Office. During his pre-war residence in Pretoria, the British Agent had frequently assured Gandhi that, if the Transvaal became a British Colony, Indian grievances would be at once redressed. High functionaries in England had declared, at the outbreak of the Boer War, that one of its causes had been the treatment accorded to the Indian subjects of the Crown by the Republican

Government. Since the territory was now under the British flag, the Indians naturally hoped to see these assurances fulfilled. Many Europeans, too, had assumed that the prohibition against Indian purchase of land outside of certain small and insanitary segregated areas, known as Asiatic locations, could no longer be enforced. They now sold land to Indians in the open market. But both parties had reckoned without their hosts. For when, under the ordinary law, the Indian purchasers tendered their title-deeds to the appropriate department for registration, this was refused, Law 3 of 1885 being again invoked in justification. Moreover, many other anti-Asiatic provisions of the law, which the Boers had, in practice, applied somewhat loosely or with some friendly discrimination in the case of individuals, were now enforced with strictness and rigidity. Indian immigration, prior to 1899, had been unrestricted. The immigrants, upon a single payment of £25, soon reduced to £3, for the right of entry and residence, were granted a certificate, which took the form of a simple receipt, without identification of the holder otherwise than by name. It was officially estimated that, at the outbreak of the war, the minimum Indian population of the Republic was fifteen thousand, besides some thousands of other Asiatics, mostly Chinese. The majority of these residents had left the Republic upon the declaration of war.

Shortly after the British occupation, in 1901, carefully restricted numbers of these refugees were allowed to return. Lord Roberts, as Commander-in-Chief, ordered all Asiatics to be registered anew. At the same time, he promised them that as soon as civil administration had been properly established their grievances would be investigated and remedied. Early in 1903, the Peace Preservation Ordinance was passed, requiring all immigrants, whether old or new, to provide themselves with permits to enter and reside in the Colony. For the first time, these documents were to some extent descriptive of the holders. Europeans, including new settlers, obtained permits without difficulty, but the old jealousy had by this time flared up again among the whites against the Indian traders. The new Asiatic Immigration Department at Pretoria was largely manned by officials from India, who imposed as many restrictions as possible upon Indian entry. Corruption and bribery enabled some only of the many Indian

refugees to return to their pre-war homes and resume their occupations.

All this and much more Gandhi learnt upon his arrival in Durban, and his compatriots urged upon him that, for the time being at least, he should transfer his activities on their behalf to the Transvaal, which Chamberlain was visiting shortly. He had the utmost difficulty in securing a permit, and succeeded in doing so only by enlisting the good offices of his old friend, the Police Superintendent of Durban, whom he reminded of his earlier residence in the Transvaal. On his arrival at Pretoria, he drafted the petition of the local Indian leaders to Chamberlain. But the Asiatic Department officials were jealous of the intrusion of this unwelcome "outsider." Were they not there to protect the Indians? It was some time before they could be persuaded that Gandhi had not, in defiance of the Peace Preservation Ordinance, rendered himself liable to prosecution for unauthorized entry into the Colony. Their annoyance at this discovery led to a summons to the Chief Officer's presence. Gandhi was kept standing, was informed that he had no right to his permit, as he was not a domiciled immigrant, and was ordered to return to Natal, without attending the delegation to wait upon Chamberlain. Gandhi was not even accorded the opportunity to reply. He pocketed the insult; but his enraged countrymen could not resist taunting him for his advice to help the British in the recent war. He urged them to forget the past and to concentrate upon the task before them. He now realized that he could not possibly return to India for the present, but must remain to help his unhappy countrymen to deal with the obviously hostile Asiatic Department. So he decided to set up office in Johannesburg, where most of the Indian traders were centred. He applied for enrolment as an Attorney of the Transvaal Supreme Court. Somewhat to his surprise there was no opposition and he was duly admitted in 1903.

Gandhi lived with the utmost simplicity in a single room next to his law office in Rissik Street. During his first sojourn in South Africa he had sought Christian companionship to keep alive in him the religious sense. Now it was the friendly members of the Theosophical Society who came to his aid. Though never a member himself, he constantly had religious discussions with them. He began to memorize the *Gita* daily verse by verse. He tells us: "I understood

more clearly in the light of the *Gita* teaching the implication of the word 'trustee.' My regard for jurisprudence increased; I discovered in it religion. I understood the *Gita* teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became to me clear as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude." Placing his sole reliance upon God, he decided to allow the insurance policy that he had taken out in Bombay to lapse, and he wrote to his elder brother in India, who had been as a father to him, that henceforth his savings, instead of going into the family purse, would be utilized for the benefit of the community in South Africa.

Once Gandhi was convinced that a certain course of conduct was right, not only for him but for others also, he could not rest, in the true missionary spirit, until he had sought to persuade them. So he spent time and money (which he never recovered) on vegetarian propaganda and helped in the maintenance of two vegetarian restaurants in Johannesburg. With the consent of a client, to whom he later made good a loss which he could ill afford, he advanced substantial loans to the proprietress of one of these restaurants, where he experimented with various types of dietary with a number of English friends. His Indian friends and clients habitually addressed him as *Bhai*<sup>1</sup> (brother). One of these warned him against excessive generosity. "I realized that even a man's reforming zeal ought not to make him exceed his limits." Another truth he learnt realistically was that sacrifice made under necessity was no virtue. His study of natural foods and nature-cure led him to give up breakfast, which relieved him from headaches, and to reduce the quantity and variety of food, which he ate without condiments or spices. Adolf Just's *Return to Nature* persuaded him to cure a tendency to constipation by the use of abdominal earth-bandages, and eventually by an exclusive diet of nuts and fresh fruits. This treatment he gave to many friends, with satisfactory results. He also advocated the use of Kuhne baths, with some success. Later, he wrote a series of Gujarati articles on dietetics, which were afterwards published in English as *A Guide to Health*.

<sup>1</sup> It was not until after his departure from South Africa that he was usually addressed as *Bapu* (father), or referred to as *Gandhiji* or Mahatma (Great Soul).

He made no distinction among his friends, whether European or Indian, white or coloured, relatives or strangers, countrymen or foreigners, high-caste or outcaste. Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsees, Christians and Jews were alike to him, and he counted all among his most intimate companions. It was no virtue on his part, for he claimed it to be in his very nature, unlike his approach to *ahimsa*, *brahmacharya* or *aparigraha* (non-attachment). Gandhi the mystic, Gandhi the devotee, Gandhi the servant of mankind, Gandhi the missionary, were so many expressions of the multiple personality of Gandhi the man, who saw God in the face of the most humble, the most hostile, the most ignoble among his fellow-men. A notable example of his own humility and his forgiving nature occurred in the course of his investigation of the corruption prevalent in the Asiatic Department. Constant complaints came to him that, although illicit immigrants had been smuggled into the Colony by bribing some of the officials, rightful entrants were being excluded or their entry was being unwarrantably delayed. The evidence that Gandhi produced satisfied the Police Commissioner of the existence of the evil. But the Commissioner knew how difficult it would be to secure the conviction of a white offender against a coloured complainant. Nevertheless, he felt that it would not be right to let the criminals go free for fear of their acquittal by a European jury. Warrants of arrest were accordingly issued against two notorious officials, regarding whom there was unchallengeable evidence. In spite of this, the jury acquitted them. Their guilt was, however, so patent that they were cashiered and dismissed from office. And then came Gandhi's opportunity of showing himself at his best. "I must say that, though these officials were so bad, I had nothing against them personally. They were aware of this themselves, and when in their straits they approached me I helped them too. They had a chance of getting employed by the Johannesburg Municipality in case I did not oppose the proposal. A friend of theirs saw me in this connexion and I agreed not to thwart them, and they succeeded. This attitude of mine put the officials with whom I came in contact perfectly at ease. . . . Man and his deed are two distinct things. . . . 'Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practised, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world. . . ."

## CHAPTER IV

### NEW CHALLENGES

**U**NDER PRESSURE of his professional work and public activities, Gandhi began to experience certain needs. First was competent secretarial help. This he obtained from two European ladies in succession. They braved current racial prejudice and gave him and the Indian community the most loyal and generous service. One was a Scotswoman, now living in Canada, who left him after her marriage a couple of years later. The other figured nobly throughout the remainder of his stay in South Africa. She was Sonja Schlesin, who still lives in Johannesburg. Among all Gandhi's associates and helpers, both he and Gokhale gave her first place for sacrifice, purity of purpose, and fearlessness. Gandhi also needed further professional assistance. He accordingly invited L. W. Ritch, an old Theosophical friend, to serve articles under him. This arrangement did not last long, as Ritch decided after some time to go to London to study for the Bar. The greatest need of all was an organ to publicize in South Africa the Indian viewpoint and cultural background. At about this time he was approached by Madanjit, who already had a printing press in Durban. A weekly paper, *Indian Opinion*, was accordingly launched in 1904, with M. H. Nazar as editor. Gandhi not only financed the paper heavily, but also constantly contributed editorials and special technical articles. Though never actually the editor of the paper, he was virtually responsible for its conduct. At first it contained advertisements, but at a later stage Gandhi felt that its independence might be compromised, and the advertisements were dropped, with consequent additional calls upon his purse. During the years that followed, until he finally left South Africa, there was hardly a week (except when he was absent from the country or serving a term of imprisonment) when he did not contribute something

of importance to the columns of the paper. "I cannot recall a word in those articles set down without thought or deliberation, or a word of conscious exaggeration, or anything merely to please. Indeed, the journal had become for me a training in self-restraint. . . . The critic found very little to which he could object. In fact, I know that the tone of *Indian Opinion* compelled the critic to put a curb on his own pen." This high standard Gandhi insisted upon with those who undertook the editorial duties from time to time. His model of objective writing was the *London Times*. He believed that the sole aim of journalism should be service.

Anti-Indian sentiment was again sweeping the country. European traders in several towns insisted that there was large-scale illicit immigration of non-domiciled Indians, and they called upon the Government to take preventive measures. Upon investigation, Lord Milner, then High Commissioner, accepted the assurance of the Chief Secretary for Permits that any but the smallest illicit influx was impossible. Nevertheless, in order to remove all cause of complaint, Lord Milner consulted the Indian leaders and explained the position to them. He suggested the advisability of voluntary re-registration by the entire Indian community, with full details of identity. He declared that "once on the register their position was established, and no further registration would be necessary nor a fresh permit required. That registration gave them the right to be here, and a right to come and go." Satisfied with this explicit undertaking, the Indian leaders who, on Gandhi's advice, had already consented to the administrative restriction of Indian immigration to that of pre-war residents, agreed to advise the voluntary re-registration of their community. This was completed to the satisfaction of the authorities. New registration certificates were issued only to those who presented Peace Preservation Ordinance permits, and only after the closest scrutiny. They bore the permit number, and contained particulars of the holder's name, family, caste or community, height, occupation, age, right thumb-impression and father's name. They were dated and signed by the issuing officer. In April, 1904, a census of the Transvaal population showed that there were fewer than ten thousand Indian residents, a clear indication that, so far from large numbers of non-domiciled Indians having entered the Transvaal,

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many pre-war residents had not yet been readmitted. These particulars are given in view of the bitter anti-Indian campaign that broke out later and led eventually to the first great passive resistance campaign headed by Gandhi.

The voteless Indians were required to reside in segregated areas, known as locations, in which they could acquire no freehold rights. The worst of these was the Johannesburg location, which had become overcrowded as increasing numbers of pre-war residents arrived, some of whom had formerly lived in outlying areas. Ordinary civic amenities, such as good lighting and decent roads, were absent; the sanitary requirements of the community were grossly neglected by the municipality, notwithstanding constant complaints. This, together with the ignorance and helplessness of the settlers, rendered the location thoroughly insanitary. Instead of removing the causes, the municipality took powers to acquire the tenures with a view to destroying the location. The settlers, having tenancy rights, were entitled to compensation for removal. The municipality's offers were frequently so inadequate that the victims engaged Gandhi to take their claims to the appellate tribunal. He charged nominal fees and allocated half the costs allowed by the tribunal to the rising expenses of *Indian Opinion*. Only one of the large number of cases that he fought was lost. Indians were not removed immediately from the location after its acquisition by the municipality, as they could not be displaced until they had secured alternative accommodation. And since they were "undesirable Asiatics," this was exceedingly difficult.

Suddenly, a great tragedy occurred, which cast its shadow over the happenings of the next ten years. An outbreak of pneumonic plague spread to the location from one of the neighbouring gold-mines. Gandhi and some Indian colleagues at once took steps to localize the outbreak. The Town Clerk was immediately notified, and Gandhi called upon his office staff and a few other fellow-workers to improvise a temporary hospital, where they nursed the victims at great personal risk. Most of those first attacked died, as did a European nurse provided by the municipality. Eventually the outbreak was brought under control. The Indian residents were then ordered to vacate the location, and, with Gandhi's assistance, were removed to a temporary camp, leaving their belongings behind. The



next night the municipal authorities destroyed the location by fire to protect the white population of Johannesburg. Many of the Indian refugees later scattered throughout the Colony to begin life afresh. Gandhi addressed a strong letter to the Press, charging the municipality with grave negligence, especially after the location had come into its possession.

Meanwhile the business side of *Indian Opinion* began to cause anxiety. An English friend of his, named Albert West, had been persuaded to leave his own printing business to join Madanjit in what the latter had assured Gandhi was a fairly prosperous concern, the printing press in Durban which published *Indian Opinion*. West soon discovered that the conduct of its affairs was unbusinesslike, and reported to Gandhi, who went to Durban to investigate.

It happened that I had just finished reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which had greatly attracted me. I gave it to Gandhi to read on the journey. He was so fascinated by the book that he could not rest that night. "I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book. . . . The one (book) that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was *Unto This Last*. . . ." The teachings of the book he understood to be:

(1) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

(2) That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

(3) That a life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.

"The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice." After consulting West, he purchased a hundred acres of agricultural land near Durban. He decided to remove the International Printing Press from the city, and, with West as manager, his two cousins, Chhaganlal and Maganlal Gandhi, and some of the press workers, he founded the Phoenix Settlement towards the end of 1904.

It was converted into a public trust in 1913. The settlers were to earn their living as farm-workers, upon a monthly allowance of £3 per head, irrespective of race or nationality. Each was to work an allotment of two acres, and in their spare time they were to produce *Indian Opinion*. He had thought that hand power would suffice for this, but he soon realized that at least an oil-engine was necessary. At times it failed to work, and then Gandhi (when present) and his fellow-workers literally put their shoulders to the wheel, so that the paper should appear promptly. Upon his return to Johannesburg he invited me to become assistant to the English editor of *Indian Opinion*, Herbert Kitchin, nephew of the Dean of Durham. Later, upon the death of Nazar and the resignation of Kitchin, who succeeded him, I became the editor of the paper.<sup>1</sup>

Though Gandhi was prevented by the constant calls of his public and professional work from living in the Phoenix Settlement, this period of his domestic life was one of the happiest. Recognizing the impossibility of his early return to India, he had meanwhile sent for his family and had set up as a small householder in a pleasant suburb of the city. He was an ideal host and he displayed that teasing humour which characterized him to the end. Always an early riser, he shared with the other members of the household the task of grinding with a hand-mill the flour from which Kasturbai, his wife, made the Kuhné bread. He walked briskly the five miles to and from the office. There, with such friends as dropped in, lunch, the first meal of the day, was taken. It consisted ordinarily of wholemeal bread spread with peanut butter and whatever fruits were in season. He gave the three sons who were with him such small educational training as they ever had, and insisted upon using Gujarati, instead of English, as the medium of instruction.<sup>2</sup> In his professional work, Gandhi gained the confidence of the Courts and the high esteem of his professional brethren. They recognized his complete integrity. He made it a practice to inform his client that if, at any stage of litigation, he was satisfied that he was being deceived, he would be at liberty to hand back his brief, for, as an officer of the Court, he could not knowingly deceive it. Nor

<sup>1</sup> Its editor since 1917 is Gandhi's second son, Manilal.

<sup>2</sup> Details of his domestic life and other matters in which he was deeply interested may be found in *Gandhi: the Man*, by Millie Graham Polak; Vora & Co., Publishers, Ltd., Bombay.

would he be persuaded to sue a client for arrears of fees, for he held that the client would not be made more honest thereby, and that he himself should pay the price of his own lack of foresight.

Meanwhile, the political situation was worsening. The arrival of many of the former residents of the Johannesburg Indian location in the provincial towns of the Transvaal had revived the impression among large sections of the white population that widespread unlawful entry into the Colony was occurring. Early in 1905, Lord Selborne, who had succeeded Lord Milner as High Commissioner, was bombarded with complaints of "continued illicit influx." He instituted a prompt and searching inquiry, the result of which led him, later that year, to administer a sharp rebuke to the complainants, declaring that he was satisfied that their allegations were false and unfounded. A new official, the Registrar of Asiatics, was placed in charge of Asiatic affairs. He issued a report showing that thirteen thousand permits had been issued to Indians—still many fewer than the pre-war figures. The Asiatic Department continued to resist the entry of domiciled Indians and frequently sought to place on the relevant laws interpretations which, in the view of the Supreme Court, they did not bear. Attempts were made, too, to prevent the entry of Indian women, even when accompanying their husbands, and of minor children, when accompanying their parents. Efforts were made to reject the registration of these minors. These endeavours also were foiled by the intervention of the Supreme Court. In order to secure the desired results indirectly, "advisory" courts, composed solely of well-known anti-Asiatics and sitting in secret, were appointed to assist the Registrar to consider Indian applications for permits. The applicants, either in person or by counsel, were not allowed to appear before them to press their claims or refute hostile evidence.

As a result, applications were constantly rejected. But if the return of domiciled Indians was ruthlessly opposed by European trade rivals, strong pressure was exercised upon the Transvaal and the Imperial authorities to authorize the introduction into the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal of ten thousand indentured labourers from India for the development of major Government enterprises, such as railway building, and with a view later to their employment in the Transvaal gold-mines. The story is briefly told in the budget

speech of Lord Curzon in the Indian Legislative Council at Calcutta, on 29 March, 1905. He recalled that, soon after the Transvaal had come under British administration, his government had urged upon the Secretary of State for India that the opportunity should be taken to remove the restrictions and disabilities imposed by the Boer Government on British Indian subjects. They had been asked to send Indian labourers for railway construction in the two new colonies, and had expressed willingness to consider the proposal if existing disabilities upon the resident Indian population and new immigrants were removed. But though the British Government had supported almost all their demands, the Transvaal authorities had declined to concede them, and the Government of India had, therefore, refused to authorize the emigration of indentured labourers to that Colony.

Gandhi was now discovering that there could be no settled life for him. Early in 1906 came the news of the Zulu Rebellion. Regarding himself still as a Natal citizen, with duties to the State, he immediately wrote to the Governor, offering to form a volunteer Indian stretcher-bearer company for service with the Natal forces. The offer was promptly accepted and Gandhi was appointed leader of the new unit, with the honorary rank of sergeant-major. The Indian company undertook the task of nursing the wounded Zulus—rebels and loyalists alike—back to health. In addition, Gandhi acted as compounder and dispenser to the white soldiers. On several occasions the Indian stretcher-bearers had to march forty miles a day to the nearest camp, often through hilly and sparsely populated country. Among the Natal commanding officers were some who had bitterly opposed Gandhi on his return from India ten years earlier. They were surprised at his devotion to this new task, and called upon him to thank him. The campaign was of short duration, and the stretcher-bearer company was soon discharged, with a letter of thanks for its services from the Governor.

One of the immediate consequences of Gandhi's offer of help had been the sudden disruption of his family life. He gave up his Johannesburg house and took his wife and children to the Phoenix Settlement. From time to time he joined them there to see that all was well with them and with the settlers. But the most far-reaching change was, with Kasturbai's consent, his taking of the solemn vow of

*brahmacharya* (celibacy). For the last six years he had been cogitating over this possibility, and during the long marches of the rebellion the need for a firm decision had become crystal-clear to him. "It was borne in upon me that I should have more and more occasions for service of the kind I was rendering, and that I should find myself unequal to my task if I were engaged in the pleasures of family life. In a word, I could not live after both the flesh and the spirit. . . . Without the observance of *brahmacharya*, service of the family would have been inconsistent with service of the community. With *brahmacharya* they would be perfectly consistent . . . I . . . took the plunge—the vow to observe *brahmacharya* for life. . . . Fasting and restriction of diet now played an important part in my life. . . . An aspirant after a life exclusively devoted to service must lead a life of celibacy. Secondly, he must accept poverty as a constant companion through life. He may not take up any occupation which would prevent him or make him shrink from undertaking the lowliest of duties or largest of risks."

To Gandhi it later seemed that events had been shaping themselves to make self-purification on his part a preparation for the crisis now rapidly approaching. The hostile leaders of the Transvaal European community, juggling with false statistics, utilizing the malicious allegations of the Indians' trade rivals, and enlisting the secret sympathies of some of the officials of the Asiatic Department, smarting under their defeats in the Supreme Court, had returned to the attack and had at last succeeded in convincing the Crown Colony Government of the existence of an organized conspiracy by the Indian leaders and community to flood the Transvaal with illicit Indian immigrants without pre-war residential rights. The constant reiteration of these charges led, even before Gandhi's return from the Zulu campaign, to the introduction of a draft measure, entitled "The Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance," in the nominated Legislative Council. It aimed ostensibly at the complete re-registration of the entire Asiatic population, the alleged object being to confirm lawfully resident Asiatics in their existing rights. The term "Asiatic" was defined as meaning "any such person as is described in Article 1 of Law No. 3 of 1885."<sup>1</sup> In other words, besides repeating the insulting

<sup>1</sup> See p. 26.

language of the ignorant republican regime twenty years earlier, the new measure completely reversed the solemn assurances of British statesmen and administrators. Not only did it confer no new rights, but it took away many existing ones, in a manner which, to use Chamberlain's significant words, "put an unnecessary affront" upon the Transvaal Indians, whose guilty knowledge of and connivance in a wholesale introduction of unlawfully resident Asiatics was assumed. It extended the scope of Law 3 of 1885, thus adding to the body of anti-Asiatic legislation already on the Statute-book. Still worse was the condemnation as criminal of all against whom it operated, for it required the surrender and cancellation of all existing permits and registration certificates, and the taking of a complete set of finger-impressions even from women and children over eight years, as though they had been condemned prisoners.

Faced with this situation, Gandhi at once recognized that a measure of this kind, humiliating to his people, dishonouring to his country, and in breach of solemn obligations by the spokesmen of the British people, could not be tolerated. Under his leadership, a mass protest meeting of Indians, including delegates from all parts of the Transvaal, was held in Johannesburg on 11 September, 1906—a historic date not only for South Africa but for Britain and for India. Gandhi himself was the principal draftsman of the resolutions put before the meeting. The fourth of these solemnly pledged the Indian community not to submit to the Ordinance, should it become law in the teeth of their opposition, but to suffer all the penalties attaching to such non-submission. The light of "passive resistance"—later known as *satyagraha*—was about to dawn.

Gandhi fully explained to his attentive audience the meaning of this resolution. One of his colleagues, a merchant named Hajee Habib, had, to his great surprise, called upon the meeting to adopt the resolution by a solemn oath before God. Gandhi was uplifted by the thought. Addressing the gathering, he reminded his hearers that to take such an oath was a most serious matter. To violate it would render them guilty before God and man. This was an occasion when, if ever, such a pledge should be taken without hesitation, but only by each one personally and with a full sense of his own responsibility. This was not a matter for a majority vote, for only those who, after

careful thought and with an understanding of the probable consequences, took the pledge would be bound by it. It was, therefore, a matter for individual heart-searching, "and if the inner voice assures him that he has the requisite strength to carry him through, then only should he pledge himself and then only would his pledge bear fruit." He warned his hearers of the dangers and suffering, including loss of personal liberty, property and even life itself, in which those engaged in the impending struggle would be involved. If the entire community stood the test, the end would be near. If not, the struggle would be prolonged. "But I can boldly declare, and with certainty, that so long as there is even a handful of men true to their pledge, there can be only one end to the struggle, and that is victory." His personal responsibility was great. There was, however, only one course open to him, in case of need—to die, but not submit to the new law. Even were he to stand alone, he would never violate his pledge. Finally, he called upon all who were unsure of themselves to refuse to take the pledge, but publicly to announce their opposition, since they must not be parties to the resolution. Each one who took the pledge must do so independently of all others, and must be true to it even unto death, no matter what others did. In the event, all present, standing with upraised hands, took an oath with God as witness not to submit to the Ordinance if it became law. That night the meeting place was accidentally burned to the ground, as though it were fated never again to witness a less noble scene.

It was always part of Gandhi's technique to take no final step until every effort had been made to secure redress by direct reference to the proper authorities. A deputation therefore waited upon the Transvaal Colonial Secretary and informed him of the pledges. Realizing the deep offence of the provision applicable to women, he undertook to have the clause deleted. Apart from this, he gave no hope of any further substantial concession. The Legislative Council duly passed the Ordinance, save for this amendment, virtually in its original form. In view of its racially contentious nature, the measure was withheld from operation pending a decision on the Royal assent which, in the circumstances, meant a reference to London. Accordingly, it was decided to send a delegation, consisting of Gandhi and H. O. Ally, a highly respected member of the community, to make

representations to the British Government and public. As a result of their representations, and with the help of Parliament, Lord Elgin, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, announced his unwillingness to advise the Royal assent to the Ordinance without further consideration. While in London, the delegates organized the South Africa British Indian Committee, with Ritch as Hon. Secretary, to take charge of publicity.

The importance of the Secretary of State's decision was over-rated by Gandhi and his colleagues. Steps had already been taken by the Imperial Government to extend responsible government to the Transvaal as from 1 January, 1907, in view of the refusal of the Boer leaders to cooperate actively with the Crown Colony administration. In order to win them over, Sir Richard Solomon, the Attorney-General, had proceeded to England, at the same time as Gandhi, to acquaint the British authorities with the position. He was given—and passed on—the informal assurance that though it was the duty of the Imperial Government to disallow the Ordinance on grounds of racial discrimination, it was very improbable that they would intervene in such a matter once self-government was in operation and a responsible government was in office—exactly the position pointed out by Chamberlain not long before in connexion with Indian disabilities in Natal.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi felt that this informal indication of the Imperial Government's attitude was a betrayal of the Indian cause and an encouragement to the hostile Transvaal Europeans, who were thereby led to resume their anti-Asiatic activities and thus to wipe out the humiliation which they had so recently undergone by the disallowance of the obnoxious Ordinance.

In the elections that followed, early in 1907, Sir Richard Solomon, then regarded as a strong candidate for the Premiership, went out of his way to suggest that the reservation clauses in the new constitution would be in practice a dead letter. General Botha, the Boer candidate for the office, was reported to have stated, in his election address, that if his party were returned to power, they would undertake to turn the "coolies" out of the country within four years. The leader of the British Progressive Party said "he was one of those who believed it would be the right thing, and he welcomed the day when all

<sup>1</sup> See p. 40.



Asiatics had to leave this country (the Transvaal)." General J. C. Smuts, the closest colleague of Botha, in a letter to a prominent Natal politician a little earlier, had made his own attitude clear: "The Asiatic cancer, which has already eaten so deeply into the vitals of South Africa, ought to be resolutely eradicated." It was thus the deliberate policy of the party leaders, by direct or indirect means, to drive Indians out. Thus in the Transvaal Parliament, which met in March, 1907, under the Premiership of Botha, with his second-in-command, Smuts, as Colonial Secretary, in charge of Asiatic affairs, ample scope was afforded to race pride, colour prejudice and trade rivalry. Further, there was widespread resentment at the temporary success of the despised "coolies," and a determination to challenge the Imperial Government to interfere, at its peril, in what were described as the internal affairs of the Colony. On 21 March the old Ordinance, unamended, was again introduced, and re-enacted within twenty-four hours by both Houses with practically no discussion, in face of Indian protest memorials. The Indian offer of voluntary re-registration, if the Bill was not proceeded with, was contemptuously rejected. One of the most influential Johannesburg newspapers remarked: "It is a cause of intense satisfaction to us, and, we doubt not, to men of all parties, that the first legislative enactment of the new Parliament should be one which asserts the right of the Colony to manage its own affairs." With the strong support of Lord Selborne, the Governor (one of whose constitutional functions was the protection of those who were unrepresented in the Transvaal Parliament), the Asiatic Law Amendment Act (Act 2 of 1907), as it was now known, went to England for Royal sanction. With it went Botha, the Prime Minister, who was attending the Imperial Conference. Thanks to the wave of "imperial" feeling that swept over England at the time, and to the united efforts of Selborne, Botha and Sir Richard Solomon, now Transvaal Agent-General in London, Lord Elgin agreed, after much hesitation, to advise the Royal assent, and the Act became law. Doubtless, a principal consideration in that decision was the probability of the resignation of the Botha Government and the refusal of any other party to take office if the measure were again disallowed.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BIRTH OF "SATYAGRAHA"

**T**HE ACT was to take effect from 1 July, 1907, and Indians were required to register under it by 31 July. Since the pledge of non-submission had been taken by them against the original Ordinance and was, therefore, technically no longer binding, mass meetings were held throughout the Transvaal to take it against the new Registration Act. The Passive Resistance Association was brought into existence, partly for the protection of the existing organizations and partly for speedier and more efficient action now that the blow had fallen. It received generous financial support from all sections of the Indian community throughout the struggle. Registration offices were opened and duly picketed by Indian volunteers, who had been warned not to threaten nor to use violence, nor to resist the police should they intervene. The volunteers circulated literature to individual members of the community, who, insufficiently aware of the legal consequences of registration, might be tempted from weakness or ignorance into completing the forms. With the exception of a few weaklings, the community kept to its pledge. In the midst of these proceedings, to leave no excuse for the authorities to accuse the Indians of mere obstruction, a further offer of re-registration was addressed to the Transvaal Government, conditionally upon the suspension of the operation of the Act and its subsequent repeal if the voluntary re-registration were successful. Again the offer was rejected.

On the last day for registration, an Indian mass-meeting was held at Pretoria. The Government had become increasingly perturbed at the unsatisfactory results so far recorded at the registration offices. Botha asked William Hosken, a Liberal member of Parliament and a good friend of the Indian community, to act as intermediary, with a

view to persuading them to accept the Act. Bearing a message from the Prime Minister, he addressed the meeting, pointing out the difficulty of Botha's position in the face of the all-but-unanimous views of the European legislators and the solid support of public opinion. He reminded Indians of the power of the Government and, whilst expressing genuine sympathy with them, urged them to prove their loyalty and love of peace by submitting to the law. Should they not do so, they might well be ruined by fruitless opposition or invite needless suffering on their heads. Gandhi translated Hosken's plea word for word, at the same time putting his own interpretation on the Government's warning. But the speech of the day was that of Ahmed Mahomed Cachalia, a merchant until then almost unknown in public life, who, by his complete self-surrender and the sacrifice of his business affairs in the interests of his people, became second only to Gandhi in their confidence. He declared with the utmost intensity and conviction that, having honestly taken the solemn pledge, he would abide by it at whatever cost, even that of life itself. The meeting decided unanimously to reject the Act and continue the struggle.

In the course of some remarks made subsequently to a meeting of Europeans at Germiston, who had expressed a wish to hear Gandhi, Hosken, who was quite free from race prejudice and later became the Chairman of the committee of European sympathizers with the Indian case, had described "passive resistance" on the part of the Indians, totally disfranchised and a small element in the Transvaal population, as "a weapon of the weak." Taken somewhat aback, Gandhi declared that, on the contrary, it was an expression of "soul-force." From then began his closer study of the subject and his conviction that unless it were a dynamic, rather than a passive, weapon of resistance, it could give no real strength to those who employed it—they must weaken and finally fail in their objective. The "passive resistance" of the English Nonconformists against the British Education Act, and of the women's suffrage movement in England, convinced him that the phrase "passive resistance" was bound to create a wrong impression of the power of the spirit, rooted in non-violence. He was confirmed in this view by his reading of Tolstoy's writings and of the American Thoreau's essay on the duty of "civil disobedience" by a citizen who felt bound to become a conscientious objector.

Hence he sought a more appropriate name than "passive resistance" for the movement, and eventually found it in *satyagraha* (truth-or soul-force).

"*Satyagraha* is soul-force pure and simple, and whenever and to whatever extent there is room for the use of arms or physical force or brute force, there and to that extent is there so much less possibility for soul force. . . . I had full realization of this antagonism at the time of the advent of *satyagraha* (in South Africa). . . . There is a great and fundamental difference between the two (i.e. passive resistance and *satyagraha*). If we continue to believe ourselves, and let others believe, that we are weak and helpless and therefore offer passive resistance, our resistance will never make us strong, and at the earliest opportunity we would give up passive resistance as a weapon of the weak. On the other hand, if we are *satyagrahis* and offer *satyagraha* believing ourselves to be strong, two clear consequences result from it. Fostering the idea of strength, we grow stronger and stronger every day. With the increase in our strength our *satyagraha*, too, becomes more effective, and we would never be casting about for an opportunity to give it up. Again, while there is no scope for love in passive resistance, on the other hand, not only has hatred no place in *satyagraha*, but it is a positive breach of its ruling principle. Whilst in passive resistance there is a scope for the use of arms when a suitable occasion arrives, in *satyagraha* physical force is forbidden even in the most favourable circumstances. . . . In passive resistance there is always present an idea of harassing the other party, and there is a simultaneous readiness to undergo any hardships entailed upon us by such activity, while in *satyagraha* there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. *Satyagraha* postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person. . . . Jesus Christ, indeed, has been acclaimed as the Prince of Passive Resisters, but I submit in that case passive resistance must mean *satyagraha* and *satyagraha* alone. . . . The phrase 'passive resistance' was not employed to denote the patient suffering of oppression by thousands of devout Christians in the early days of Christianity. . . . If their conduct be described as passive resistance, passive resistance becomes synonymous with *satyagraha*."

## EARLY YEARS

While Gandhi was pondering upon the problem of soul-force, the Immigrants' Restriction Act was passed. Read with the Asiatic Law Amendment Act, or Black Act as it came to be known, this law treated as prohibited immigrants those who could pass its tests but were ineligible for registration under the Black Act. As the Indian community had made up its mind that the Asiatic Law Amendment Act must go, it was not perturbed by this new disability, because, once the Registration Act was removed from the Statute book, there would no longer be any special impediment to the entry of cultured Indians. *Indian Opinion*<sup>1</sup> had by this time become the principal organ of the resistance movement. Gandhi later expressed the opinion that, without the paper, it would not have been possible adequately to educate the Indian community or to keep the Motherland and British opinion in touch with events in South Africa. It was, therefore, in his view, "a most useful and potent weapon in our struggle." Because there was no secrecy to be observed and the details, purposes and methods of the movement were frankly revealed in the columns of the paper, it was read diligently by the officials of the Asiatic Department.

By way of warning, a number of the less-known Indians were summoned to appear before a magistrate to show cause why, having failed to apply for registration within the permitted time, they should not be ordered to leave the Transvaal. They were directed, as prohibited immigrants, to leave the Colony within a given period and, when they disobeyed, they were sentenced to short terms of simple imprisonment. Gandhi was deeply disappointed that he was not taken with the first batch of prisoners. Realizing that the strength of the movement could not thus be broken, the authorities soon relieved him of his anxiety to share his humbler countrymen's imprisonment, by requiring him and several prominent colleagues to show cause before the magistrate, on 27 December, why they should not be similarly treated. The new victims included the chairman of the Transvaal Chinese Association. As they did not obey the magistrate's order to leave the Transvaal, they were called upon to attend Court for sentence on 10 January, 1908. No defence was offered; all pleaded guilty to the formal charges preferred by the Crown. Gandhi asked

<sup>1</sup> The writer was its editor from 1906 to 1916.

leave to make a short statement. He said that he felt that a distinction should be made between himself and his fellow-accused. He had just heard that substantially heavier sentences than those now contemplated had been imposed upon some of his compatriots in Pretoria. If these had committed offences involving heavy penalties, his own offence had been greater by far, and he accordingly asked the magistrate to impose the heaviest penalty of the law. The magistrate, however, who had always held Gandhi in the highest esteem as a practitioner, and was now obviously embarrassed to see him in the prisoner's dock, courteously declined the invitation and sentenced him to two months' simple imprisonment. He was at once removed in custody to the prisoners' cell, where for some time he sat brooding over the situation. Would his people court imprisonment, as they had promised, so that the struggle might soon be brought to an end, or would they fail him now that he was under lock and key? By the time of his removal to the Johannesburg jail he had recovered his confidence. It was not without significance that over the jail portico was carved (in Dutch) the motto of the old South African Republic: "Unity Makes Strength."

Being coloured prisoners, he and his colleagues did not enjoy pleasant conditions of confinement. As only two classes of convicts were recognized—Whites and Negroes (or "Natives")—the Indians were classed with the latter. They were confined in the Negro ward and were required to wear Negro prison-uniform. It may here be noted that the so-called "Gandhi cap," later one of the outward symbols of Congress Party loyalty, is none other than a replica of the headgear that he wore as a coloured prisoner in South Africa. Food conditions, too, were difficult, as the jail authorities had no experience of an Indian dietary and were unwilling to disturb the ordinary routine. The medical superintendent was indifferent. Presently the prison cells became crowded with Indian resisters who had courted arrest in increasing numbers. At first they had been sentenced to terms of simple imprisonment, but as their numbers grew the Courts later imposed only terms of hard labour, even in the case of women. Those sentenced to simple imprisonment, restive with their compulsory idleness, offered their services in keeping the cells and their surroundings clean, and Gandhi resumed his voluntary occupation of scavenging.

To get fresh air and exercise, they asked for drill, which was given by a white warder.

Meanwhile, with the daily arrival of Indian prisoners, they got all the news of the community they needed. Within a fortnight they learnt that negotiations appeared to be pending with the Government for a compromise. The Transvaal ministers had become alarmed by the increasing seriousness of the struggle, upon which opinion in South Africa, India and Britain was now focussed. A few days later Albert Cartwright, the broad-minded editor of the *Transvaal Leader*, who had generally supported the Indian cause and was a good friend of Gandhi, called to see him. Cartwright brought the terms of a settlement which, it was believed, had been approved by Smuts. He had, after Gandhi's arrest, interviewed Smuts, who had welcomed his mediation. He had then met the Indian leaders still at large, but they would agree to nothing without Gandhi's advice.

The substance of the proposed agreement was that the Indians should register voluntarily and not under the law; that the details to be entered in the new certificates of registration should be settled by the Government in consultation with the Indian community; and that if the majority of the Indians underwent voluntary registration, the Black Act would be repealed, and the Government would take steps to legalize the voluntary registration. The draft, however, did not make sufficiently clear the condition requiring repeal. As this was an essential feature of any acceptable agreement, Gandhi suggested a modification of the draft calculated to place this beyond doubt. Cartwright hesitated to alter the draft which, he said, Smuts regarded as final. But, on consulting his colleagues, Gandhi insisted on the change of wording. They signed the alteration and Cartwright promised to place the amended draft before Smuts for his consent.

On 30 January,<sup>1</sup> 1908, the Johannesburg Police Superintendent called to take Gandhi to Pretoria, to see Smuts. It was their first meeting, and they had a long talk in which they discussed the original draft agreement and the suggested amendments conveyed by Cartwright. From Gandhi's report of this interview,<sup>2</sup> it is clear he was convinced that Smuts, speaking for the Transvaal Government,

<sup>1</sup> The date of his assassination forty years later.

<sup>2</sup> *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 242.

accepted the alterations in the draft and undertook to repeal the Asiatic Act as soon as most of the Indians had undergone voluntary registration. Following this talk, Gandhi and his compatriots were immediately released.

The General advised him not to hold meetings or demonstrations, as these would embarrass the Government. Gandhi said that there would be no unnecessary demonstrations, but that he would have to hold meetings to explain to the community how the settlement was to be effected, what was its nature and scope, and how it had added to their responsibilities. Smuts was satisfied with this explanation. Gandhi was without a penny, and Smuts's secretary provided him with the railway fare to Johannesburg, where he arrived that evening and immediately called a public meeting in the Mosque grounds at midnight, to explain what had happened. Previously he had had a conference with the leaders, who were in general agreement. One doubt, nevertheless, troubled them: "What if General Smuts broke faith with us? The Black Act might not be enforced, but it would always hang over our heads like Damocles' sword. If, in the meanwhile, we registered voluntarily, we would have knowingly played into the adversary's hands, and surrendered the most powerful weapon in our possession for resisting the Act. The right order for the settlement was that the Act should be repealed first, and then that we should be called upon to register voluntarily."<sup>1</sup>

To this argument Gandhi replied that the compromise was binding upon both parties. The Government had secured an agreement that should set the suspicions of the Europeans at rest. The Indians had secured by voluntary arrangement the removal of the stigma of the Black Act. A true *satyagrahi*, bidding goodbye to fear, was not afraid to trust his opponent. However, should the Government commit a breach of faith, then, having fulfilled their own part of the agreement, there was nothing to prevent *satyagrahis* resuming the struggle. They could do this effectively by refusing to produce the voluntary registration certificates upon demand, and then taking the consequences. "We are fearless and free, so long as we have the weapon of *satyagraha* in our hands." This analysis satisfied the doubters.

A very different situation, however, faced Gandhi at the general

<sup>1</sup> *Satyagraha in South Africa*, pp. 245-7.



meeting, when he explained the terms and spirit of the agreement, and asked for a vote in its support. It was now evident that the mere giving of finger-impressions, whether under compulsion or voluntarily, had come to be regarded as a mortal sin by the fanatical element in the community. Hardly had Gandhi finished speaking when a Pathan fired a volley of questions at him. "Shall we have to give the ten finger-prints under the settlement?" and so on. Gandhi at once sought to explain again the difference between compulsion and voluntary action, and said that those who had a conscientious objection to giving the digit impressions in any circumstances, or who thought it derogatory to their self-respect, would not be obliged to do so. "What will you do yourself?" "I have decided to give ten finger-prints. It may not be for me not to give them myself while advising others to do so." In reply to further questions, he sought to show how the situation was now vitally different from what it would have been under the Act which was to be repealed.

Then came the first indication that a few latitudinarians present had been casting suspicion upon Gandhi's rectitude. "We have heard," shouted the Pathan, "that you have betrayed the community and sold it to General Smuts for £15,000. We will never give the finger-prints nor allow others to do so. I swear, with Allah as my witness, that I will kill the man who takes the lead in applying for registration." Promptly taking up the Pathan's challenge, Gandhi made it clear that while he would render all possible help to anyone who objected to giving finger-impressions, he must protest against a threat "in the name of the Most High" to murder a brother, and repeated that, at whatever risk, he would, as the principal party responsible for this settlement and as a servant of the community, regard it as his clear duty to take the lead in giving finger-impressions. "To die by the hand of a brother, rather than by disease or in some such other way, cannot be for me a matter of sorrow. And if in such a case I am free from the thoughts of anger or hatred against my assailant, I know that that will redound to my eternal welfare, and even the assailant will later on realize my perfect innocence." The Pathan's questions made little or no impression on the meeting, which voted almost unanimously in favour of the settlement.

In view of what followed almost immediately and was repeated



*Gandhi and his staff at Johannesburg. Front row, left to right:  
H. S. L. Polak, M. K. Gandhi, Sonja Schlesin .*



*Gandhi and (on his right) Dr. Booth with members of their Red Cross Unit. Gandhi was the effective leader of 1,100 Indian Ambulance Corps volunteers during the South African War*



*Farewell to Johannesburg, 1914. Front row, left to right: H. S. L. Polak, Mrs. Polak, H. Kallenbach, Mrs. Gandhi, M. K. Gandhi*

with fatal results forty years later, it is interesting to recall that when, some months earlier, Rev. Joseph J. Doke, a Baptist minister, asked him: "How far are you prepared to make a martyr of yourself for the good of the cause?" Gandhi had replied: "It is a matter with me of complete surrender. . . . I am willing to die at any time, or to do anything for the cause."

A few days later, the Registrar of Asiatics notified Gandhi that the arrangements for voluntary registration had now been completed, and that the registration office would be open on 10 February, 1908. So that the matter should be quickly completed, Gandhi and the other leaders had arranged to take out their certificates on the first day. He met some of the leaders at his law-office and started with them for the registration office, with the intention of himself being the first to register. Just before reaching his destination, he was accosted by a group of Pathans, who demanded to know where he was going. He at once sensed the impending danger, and replied: "I propose to take out a certificate of registration, giving the ten finger-prints. If you will go with me, I will first get you a certificate with an impression only of the two thumbs (the old certificates bore a thumb-print), and then I will take one for myself, giving the finger-prints." The words had scarcely left his lips when he was struck on the head from behind, and fell to the ground fainting, uttering the name of God. The attackers repeatedly struck and kicked him, as well as two colleagues who sought to intervene. They were caught by some European passers-by, and held until the police arrived to take them into custody. Gandhi was removed to a friend's office, and when he recovered consciousness he found Doke, his Baptist minister friend, anxiously bending over him. In great pain, he accepted Doke's invitation to be looked after by him and his wife at their home. Before removal there, he asked for the release of his attackers. The police refused this request. The Registrar of Asiatics, who had been informed of the assault, called upon him, listened to Gandhi's request to be the first to register, went away for the necessary papers and returned to take Gandhi's finger-impressions. A doctor then stitched his wounds, gave him other necessary treatment and left him in the Dokes' care.

Gandhi could not rest until he had telegraphed to the Attorney-General requesting him not to proceed against those who had, in

their ignorance, assaulted him. He made it clear that should they be charged, he would not bear witness against them. But a number of Europeans, hearing of Gandhi's request, addressed a strong protest to the Attorney-General, urging him to take criminal proceedings. The Pathans were duly charged, convicted on the evidence of English witnesses of the assault, and sentenced to three months' hard labour. Gandhi was not summoned as a witness for the Crown. Meanwhile, in spite of his injuries, he wrote an appeal to the Indian community, urging that the blood spilt should cement unity among them, rather than promote dissension between Hindus and Muslims. "Those who have committed the act did not know what they were doing. They thought that I was doing what was wrong. They have had their redress in the only manner they know." That night, before he could be persuaded to rest, he asked little Olive Doke to sing his favourite hymn, "Lead, kindly Light." Then he fell asleep peacefully. A few days later he had recovered sufficiently to return to work.

Soon after his recovery, he learnt that the misunderstanding as to the nature of the settlement, and his motives in advocating its acceptance, had spread to Natal. His fifteen years' experience of the Indian community had made him appreciate that "the Transvaal struggle was not a mere local affair, and the Indians in the Transvaal were really fighting the battle on behalf of all the Indians in South Africa." He accordingly left for Durban at once, in order to address a public meeting there and try to clear up the misunderstanding. On arrival, he was warned by friends that should he attend it he would be attacked. But he was undismayed. "If a servant, when called by his master, fails to respond through fear, he forfeits his title to the name of servant. . . . Service of the public for service's sake is like walking on the sword's edge. If a servant is ready enough for praise he may not flee in the face of blame. . . . Death is only a big change in life and nothing more, and should be welcome when it arrives. . . . As for me, nothing better can happen to a *satyagrahi* than meeting death all unsought in the very act of *satyagraha*, i.e. pursuing Truth." He therefore insisted upon presenting himself to the meeting at the appointed time, explained how the settlement had been effected and answered questions to clarify the issue. The proceedings were nearly over when a Pathan, carrying a big stick, rushed on to the platform. The lights

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were put out, but friends at once surrounded Gandhi to protect him, and Parsee Rustonjee, one of his staunchest colleagues, summoned a posse of police, who escorted him to safety.

Next day he again met the Pathans, who evidently had a preconceived notion, which nothing could shake, that he had betrayed the community. For security's sake, a party of friends escorted him to Phoenix, where he visited his family, and remained on guard during his short stay. There he analysed, for the benefit of doubters, the details of the settlement in an article appearing in *Indian Opinion*. He so far succeeded in satisfying the Transvaal Indians that almost all of them registered voluntarily. "There was such a rush of applicants for registration that the officers concerned were hard pressed with work, and in a very short time the Indians had fulfilled their part of the settlement. . . . Even the Government had to admit this. . . ."

The Indian community now looked forward to the repeal of the Black Act, which would bring the *satyagraha* struggle to an end. This in itself would not mean the removal of the general body of anti-Indian legislation in the Colony, or of all the Indian grievances. *Satyagraha* had been directed solely against the Act, submission to which would have led ultimately to the extinction of the community, first in the Transvaal and later throughout South Africa. The Black Act, however, was retained on the Statute book, and a new measure was introduced validating the voluntary registrations and the certificates issued subsequent to the date fixed under the Act, taking the holders of the voluntary registration certificates out of its operation, but "making further provision for the registration of Asiatics." In effect, there were to come into force two concurrent laws having the same objects, freshly arriving Indians as well as later applicants for registration being still subject to the Black Act. When he read the new Bill, Gandhi was amazed. He at once convened a meeting of the Passive Resistance Committee, at which he had to face some taunts directed against his credulity. With a characteristic smile he replied: "What you call my credulity is part and parcel of myself. It is the duty of every one of us . . . to trust our fellow-men. . . . You must take me as you find me, with my defects no less than my qualities." He insisted that the community's enthusiasm, if genuine, had been enlisted in a righteous cause, that the broken faith of their opponents

should rather stimulate than discourage that enthusiasm. "We have to consider what we can do in case the struggle has to be resumed, that is to say, what each *satyagrahi* can do absolutely regardless of the conduct of others. . . . If only we are true to ourselves, others will not be found wanting, and even if they are inclined to weakness, they will be strengthened by our example."

Facing up to the new situation, Gandhi wrote to Smuts, saying that the new Bill constituted a breach of the compromise, and drawing his attention to a passage in a public speech delivered by him within a week of the settlement: "The Indians' second contention was that they would never register until the law had been repealed. . . . He had told them that the law would not be repealed so long as there was an Asiatic in the country who had not registered. . . . Until every Indian in the country had registered the law would not be repealed."<sup>1</sup> Gandhi received no satisfactory reply, and then he consulted Cartwright, who had acted as mediator in the settlement. Cartwright said: "Really I cannot understand this. I perfectly remember that he promised to repeal the Asiatic Act. I will do my best, but you know that nothing can move General Smuts when he has once taken up a stand." Hosken, too, wrote to Smuts, but with equal lack of success. Gandhi described the Government's attitude, in articles contributed to *Indian Opinion*, as "foul play," and in view of the impending passage of the Bill, decided that steps should at once be taken to prepare for an early renewal of the struggle. The community was kept abreast of current events by *Indian Opinion*, and warned of the impending failure of the compromise under which the Indians had taken out their voluntary registration certificates. They were asked to hold themselves in readiness to burn these if, after all, the Black Act was not repealed, and thus to "let the Government note that the community was fearless and firm and ready to go to prison." Certificates were collected from every place with a view to making a bonfire of them. A petition against the Bill presented to the Legislature on behalf of the Indians having failed of its purpose, what was described by Smuts as an "ultimatum" was sent to the Government by the *satyagrahis*. After reciting the terms of the agreement, the successful completion of voluntary registration, the failure of the Government to repeal the Act, and Smuts's silence upon

<sup>1</sup> *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 301.

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receipt by him of several communications, the Indian leaders warned the Government of the strong feeling prevalent in the community, and declared that, if the Act were not repealed and if the Government's decision to that effect were not communicated to the Indians before a specific date, the certificates collected by the Indians would be burnt, and they would humbly but firmly take the consequences. This document was held to contain two grounds of offence. One was that it prescribed a time-limit for a reply. The other was the audacity of a non-white community in challenging a decision taken by a white Government, responsible to a legislature composed solely of Europeans representing an entirely European electorate. To many South African Europeans these were unpardonable faults, requiring condign punishment. A number, however, congratulated the Indians on their courage.

On 10 August, two hours after the expiry of the time-limit, a crowded meeting was held in the Mosque grounds in Johannesburg. The proceedings had been delayed in case an unexpectedly favourable telegraphic reply was received. The telegram came, but the Government, while regretting the determination of the Indian community, announced their inability to alter their decision. The meeting began with a warning to the audience by the chairman to be on their guard in this new emergency. Gandhi himself urged any Indian present who had handed in his registration certificate to be burnt, but who at the last moment might feel any hesitation, to take it back. Recalling that at the beginning of the struggle a few hesitants had decided to register under the Black Act, he urged those present not to take any final step until after due consideration. But he was repeatedly interrupted by those who urged that the certificates should be burnt immediately. No one stood up when Gandhi appealed to anyone who wished to oppose the resolution to do so now, and it was carried unanimously. Then the Pathan who had led the assault upon Gandhi, and had just been released from prison, stepped forward. He announced his regret at the wrong he had done to Gandhi. Not having taken out a voluntary registration certificate, he handed over his original certificate to be burnt. Gandhi warmly clasped his hand, assuring him that he had never harboured resentment against him. The great moment had arrived. Thousands of certificates were thrown into a great cauldron



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and set ablaze by the chairman, to the continuous cheering of the whole assembly, which rose spontaneously to its feet. Indians who had not previously handed in their certificates for destruction now came forward to do so. One of the journalists present, in reporting the proceedings, compared the burning of the certificates to the "Boston Tea Party." "I do not think this comparison did more than justice to the Indians, seeing that . . . here in South Africa a helpless body of thirteen thousand Indians had challenged the powerful Government of the Transvaal. The Indians' only weapon was faith in the righteousness of their cause and in God. There is no doubt that this weapon is all-sufficient and all-powerful for the devout, but so long as that is not the view of the man in the street, thirteen thousand unarmed Indians might appear insignificant before the well-armed Europeans of South Africa."<sup>1</sup>

Thus was the great struggle launched anew, and it was then that Ahmed Mahomed Cachalia came to the leadership of the movement. He had throughout made clear his opposition to the Black Act, at any cost to himself. Now his European creditors, thinking to restrain him, threatened him with bankruptcy unless he paid them immediately or left the *satyagraha* movement. Cachalia bravely replied that his participation in the struggle was his personal affair, which had nothing to do with his business. He considered that his religion, the honour of his community and his own self-respect were bound up with the struggle. At a meeting of his creditors Gandhi, as he had successfully done in the case of other clients, made various suggestions to them, showing that Cachalia's finances were in good order and that his debts were fully covered. But as the creditors' attitude was political and Cachalia would not bend, or even borrow from willing friends to satisfy his obligations, bankruptcy proceedings were instituted against him and, on technical grounds, he was declared insolvent. Ordinarily, this would have affected his leadership, since insolvency was regarded by the Indian community as a disgrace to the individual trader and to themselves. But in the circumstances Cachalia's reputation rose higher than ever, not only among his countrymen, who were confident of his political and commercial integrity, but also among the European merchants who depended so much

<sup>1</sup> *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 314.

upon Indian trade. Within a year the creditors were paid in full from the "insolvent's" estate, and even before this he had succeeded to the chairmanship of the Passive Resistance Committee and of the Transvaal British Indian Association, with Gandhi, as always, his guide, philosopher and friend.

"A law of progression applies to every righteous struggle. But in the case of *satyagraha* the law amounts to an axiom. As the Ganges advances, other streams flow into it. . . . So, also, as a *satyagraha* struggle progresses onward, many another element helps to swell its current, and there is a constant growth in the results to which it leads." The immediate object of the new struggle was the Transvaal Immigrants Restriction Act, which treated as prohibited immigrants those who could pass education tests but were ineligible for registration under the Black Act. It thus prevented the entry of a single Indian newcomer, however high his qualifications. Had the Black Act been repealed, there would have been no need to include in the *satyagraha* campaign the amendment of the Immigration Act. Since, however, the former had not been repealed, Gandhi felt it was imperative to oppose the latter measure. Representations for the amendment of the Immigration Act were made to the Government by the Indian community, and also by a number of their European sympathizers. Smuts criticized the Indians for their "lawlessness," and Gandhi especially, whom he described to the sympathizers as a "cunning fellow," whom he knew better than they did, and who had raised a fresh point, though, in fact, he himself had been responsible for securing the passage of the new measure. Were he, he told them, to yield an inch, Gandhi would ask for an ell. He challenged Gandhi to do his worst, and refused again either to repeal the Asiatic Act or to amend the Immigration Act. The effect upon the European sympathizers was to strengthen their opposition to Smuts and to increase their sympathy for Gandhi and his people. The Indians realized that it had become an all-out fight for the retention of such rights as they had before the advent of responsible government. Indeed, Gandhi had some difficulty in opposing the demand of some Indians to extend *satyagraha* to include the repeal of all anti-Asiatic legislation throughout South Africa. He held that, whilst it was right and justifiable to offer *satyagraha* to new legislation affecting the community,

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it would not be proper to extend its application in any other way.

Now that *satyagraha* was directed against the Immigration Act it became necessary, after due notice to the authorities, to challenge that law, as well as the Black Act. It was part of the *satyagraha* technique to notify the authorities in advance of intended breaches of the law. A number of educated Indians from Natal, as also some of the leading traders of Natal who had earlier domicile rights in the Transvaal, crossed the border after such notification. The offenders were duly arrested, convicted and sentenced to terms of hard labour. The effect of their example was greatly to encourage the Transvaal *satyagrahis*. Since the Government knew that the latter were all registered, even though they had destroyed their certificates of registration, new methods of seeking arrest were sought. It was decided to hawk goods without licences, which could be obtained only by presenting these certificates on demand. This, too, was an offence against the law, of which again the authorities were duly notified. They could no longer refuse to take cognizance of this widespread defiance, and soon the jails were once more filled with *satyagrahis* sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, mostly with hard labour. The jail officials harassed the Indians in every way, imposing such heavy tasks as stone-breaking and road-making, and making life unpleasant by denying them suitable dietary, separating them from friends and keeping them in solitary confinement without adequate exercise. Gandhi himself suffered many of these hardships during one of his terms of imprisonment, though it is to be recalled that, on another occasion, Smuts sent him some books to relieve the monotony of his confinement. Nothing, however, daunted the spirit of the *satyagrahis*, many of whom went to jail repeatedly, while many more were ruined and numbers were driven from their homes.



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of the South Africa British Indian Committee, was found to be a firm sympathizer with the Indian cause, and he acted as intermediary with Botha and Smuts, as well as with other leading members of the South African European delegations. Presently he brought to Gandhi and his colleague a message to the effect that Botha was willing to make some minor concessions, but refused to repeal the Asiatic Act or amend the Immigrants Restriction Act; nor would he remove the race- or colour-bar, which was the law of the land and had the support of the great bulk of white opinion. Smuts was in complete accord with Botha. Indeed, at a public meeting in India shortly afterwards, Gokhale, whom Gandhi had kept informed of the negotiations in London, stated that Smuts had declared to Lord Crewe that he was not prepared to admit even the theoretical equality of Asiatics with white people.

Amphill pointed out that if more were demanded the Indians would lay themselves open to further trouble and suffering. He was, therefore, inclined to the view that, as a matter of practical wisdom, Botha's offer should be accepted. Acting as interpreter, Gandhi informed him that his Muslim colleague, rightly claiming to represent the majority of the Transvaal Indian trading community, was willing, for the present, to accept it, whilst reserving the right at a later stage, if necessary, to struggle for recognition of the larger principle. Gandhi, however, declared that he and his *satyagrahi* followers were resolute unto death in rejecting the offer, and in standing not only for practical relief but also for the principle involved. Amphill at once rose to the occasion and assured Gandhi of his continued sympathy and support in a struggle fought with clean weapons. He also volunteered to continue as President of the South African Committee.

During his stay in England, several Indian terrorists tried to persuade Gandhi to drop non-violence, but he steadily refused and, on the contrary, sought to convert them to *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. It was largely because of the growing conflict of opinion as to the means to secure freedom for his Motherland that, on the voyage back to Capetown, in November, 1909, he wrote the historic pamphlet *Hind Swaraj*, later translated as "Indian Home Rule." On the same voyage he wrote an introduction to Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindu*. He had previously confirmed its authenticity with the author, to whom

he had written of the struggle and its history. Tolstoy, as an ardent advocate of non-violence, wrote in reply,<sup>1</sup> expressing his keen interest in the Transvaal struggle as being "the first attempt to apply the principle of *satyagraha* to masses or bodies of men."

As a result of the British and Boer leaders' visit to London, the agreed draft constitution was adopted by the British Government and Parliament, in 1909, without any reservations whatever, and came into force the following year, with Botha as the first Union Prime Minister and Smuts as his foremost colleague. As long ago as 1928, Gandhi expressly recognized the independent character of Dominion status<sup>2</sup> as evidenced by the position of South Africa under its constitution. "South Africa obtained full self-government. . . . It is no exaggeration to say that South Africa is completely independent. The British Empire cannot receive a single farthing from South Africa without the consent of its Government. Not only that, but British ministers have conceded that, if South Africa wishes to remove the Union Jack and to be independent even in name, there is nothing to prevent her from doing so."

At the same time as the Transvaal Indians decided to send their deputation to London, they agreed to send another to India, to acquaint the Government and public with the background and details of the *satyagraha* struggle. At Gandhi's suggestion, I was appointed its leader, my colleagues being three Indian *satyagrahis* who, however, were almost immediately arrested and imprisoned for their part in the campaign. The Transvaal Government were evidently hopeful that the deputation project would fall through, but Gandhi and the Indian leaders insisted that I should proceed alone on this mission. Doke was to act, during the absence of Gandhi and myself, as editor of *Indian Opinion*. Gandhi stressed two important matters. One was that I should look to Gokhale, with whom he had been in close correspondence since the beginning of the struggle, for help and advice in all my activities. He asked me to make it clear to him and the other leaders that, while the Indians were fighting for *legal*

<sup>1</sup> The text of Tolstoy's letter to Gandhi was reprinted in the *Hindustan Review* of March, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> In January, 1937, in a letter to the writer, Gandhi defined *Purna Swaraj* as equivalent to "Dominion status" under the Statute of Westminster, which he interpreted, with the right of secession at will, as "complete independence."

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equality with European British subjects, especially as regards residence and immigration, *administrative* differentiation, at that stage, and with the prevalent racial prejudice, could not be avoided. What was essential was the fixing of right standards, in the hope that, in due course, practice would conform to them. The second was that I should place the realities of the indenture system before the Indian public and seek to bring it to an end for Natal at an early date, not only because of its inherent evils, but also because the constant influx of indentured Indians increasingly lowered the prestige of the South African Indian community and of the Motherland.

On my arrival in India, in August, 1909, I placed myself under Gokhale's guidance. He was then the leader of the non-official Opposition in the old Imperial Legislative Council. I discussed with him in detail the South African situation generally, and especially Gandhi's hope that indentured labour emigration to Natal would be terminated. The Servants of India Society, of which he was President, and V. S. Srinivasa Sastri—later the first Agent of the Government of India in the Union—senior Member, made contacts for me throughout the country. The public, irrespective of race or community, and the Press of all opinions and whether British- or Indian-owned, responded most sympathetically to the appeals which I had the opportunity of making by speeches and articles. G. A. Natesan published *The Indians of South Africa* and a monograph entitled *M. K. Gandhi*, the first biographical material on the South African Indian leader to appear in India.<sup>1</sup> Natesan was one of the foremost Indian publicists, who had long been an active supporter through his magazine, *The Indian Review*.

At the first public meeting in Bombay, in September, 1909, Gokhale, having described Gandhi as one who could "mould heroes out of common clay," declared that "Mr. Gandhi's struggle is in furtherance of the future interests of our Motherland . . . this country is now included in the British Empire, and our progress must be towards complete equality with our English and other fellow-subjects in that Empire. Here again, as practical men, we are prepared to recognize that the attainment of such equality, and the obliteration

<sup>1</sup> Both by this writer. Doke's book, *M. K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, had been published in England a few months earlier.

of race-distinctions which it involves, can be but a slow affair. But we have a right to insist that the movement must be in the direction of a steady removal of these distinctions . . . and not towards adding further to them. In fighting for the principle that no humiliating disabilities shall be imposed by the Statute book of a British colony on Indians as Indians, Mr. Gandhi is fighting for the assertion of our claim to that equality with which our hopes for the future are bound up." At the twenty-fourth session of the Indian National Congress at Lahore, in December, which I was invited to address, Gokhale, in moving a resolution of encouragement to and sympathy with "Gandhi and his brave and faithful associates," urged "the necessity of prohibiting the recruitment of indentured labour for any portion of the South African Union, and of dealing with the authorities there in the same manner in which the latter deal with Indian interests, so long as they adhere to the selfish and one-sided policy which they proclaim and practise, and persist in their present course of denying to His Majesty's Indian subjects their just rights as citizens of the Empire."<sup>1</sup> Referring to Gandhi's part in the struggle, Gokhale said: "Mr. Gandhi is one of those men who, living an austere simple life themselves and devoted to all the highest principles of love of their fellow-beings and to truth and justice, touch the eyes of their weaker brethren as with magic and give them a new vision. He is a man who may well be described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots, and we may well say that, in him, Indian humanity at the present time has really reached its high watermark."

Gokhale, on more than one occasion, had raised the South African Indian question in the Legislative Council. He had found the Government of India responsive and sympathetic. Indeed, it may be said that there never was any fundamental difference between the Government and the Indian public on the treatment and rights of Indians overseas, especially in South Africa. On 25 February, 1910, he moved in the Council a resolution recommending that the Governor-General in Council should prohibit the recruitment of indentured labour in British India for the Colony of Natal. He told of the indentured

<sup>1</sup> This was the first time that the retaliatory policy, embodied many years later in the Indian Reciprocity Act, was publicly advocated.



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labour system, and among other subjects referred to the annual licence of £3 imposed since 1906 upon every male ex-indentured Indian above the age of sixteen and every female above the age of thirteen, as one of the conditions of residence in the Colony. He wished to give the Indian Government a negotiating weapon, in order to secure better treatment of the South African Indians generally. The resolution was unanimously carried and accepted by the Government. But General Botha's Government, in the negotiations that followed, refused to give way on any fundamental matter, and the Government of India put an end to recruitment in the following year.

Gandhi had informed me, upon his return to South Africa, that the Botha Government were contemplating more forceful steps to check, if not to bring about the collapse of, the movement. Presently he cabled that a number of Transvaal Indians, some of them South African-born and all domiciled there, were being unlawfully deported to India. Upon their arrival, Natesan was their host until they sailed back with me to South Africa. We arrived soon after mid-1910. As the result of successful action in the Courts on their behalf, they were allowed to land and return to their homes. As the struggle became prolonged, Gandhi felt that only devoted *satyagrahis* should be relied upon, since in no circumstances would they surrender to temptation or to fear of the consequences. He accordingly decided that he must no longer practise as a lawyer. The compulsion of political events had made it increasingly difficult for him to attend to the needs of his clients, to whom he had given even his Sundays, for, he said, a man in trouble knew no day of rest. Moreover, to earn a livelihood from a profession which finally made an appeal to the policeman or the jailer to enforce the decrees of the Courts was, in his view, a denial of *ahimsa*.

He had become more and more attracted to the simple life of the farmer and the craftsman. Kallenbach, an architect with whom he lived for some time after his family's removal to Phoenix, strongly shared his views. Soon a time came when, with the constant imprisonment of the chosen *satyagrahis*, it became necessary to make provision for their families. Owing to the relatively small funds available, Gandhi decided that community life would result in substantial

economies, and that it would create a family background for the *satyagrahis* as they were released. Since the struggle was in the Transvaal, it was necessary to find some centre not too far from Johannesburg. Kallenbach, eager to make his contribution to the struggle, came to the rescue by purchasing, some twenty-one miles from the Golden City, a large farm which he placed at the disposal of Gandhi and his colleagues. This was the famous Tolstoy Farm where, under Gandhi's guidance, the *satyagrahis* and their families lived together in a brotherly spirit, each playing his proper part in the community life, each offering service and sacrifice in a noble cause. Each was free to follow his own religious customs and taught to respect those of others. They joined in community worship, with songs and prayers drawn from the various faiths represented. Small houses were built by skilled workers under Kallenbach's direction. Gandhi saw to the sanitary arrangements, as he had done at Phoenix, and so enlarged the practical experience which was to serve him in such good stead in his village welfare campaigns upon his return to India. A schoolhouse was erected, and he and others gave simple education to the children in one or other of the Indian languages, with elementary English as a necessary ingredient. Co-education was a passion with him; but presently he found the need of care and caution in the case of adolescents, and so character-building formed the foundation of his system. Presently, too, under Kallenbach's guidance, workshops for carpentry, shoe- and sandal-making and other handicrafts were built. It was here that the sandals were made which, upon Gandhi's final departure from South Africa, he sent as a farewell gift to Smuts, who used them for many years afterwards. The cultivation of the land was the primary occupation of the settlers, who put away their city clothing and wore that of manual workers.

All this cost money, and it was primarily to save public funds that Gandhi, whenever he had to go by train in connexion with public work, began his practice of third-class travel. The *satyagrahi* families, though under no compulsion to do so, agreed to abide by his vegetarian regime. Smoking and drinking were, however, prohibited. Gandhi made many successful experiments, too, in nature-cure treatment. Other experiments were made in dietary, including the beginning of

five years of rigid "fruitarianism." The results were summarized in his booklet on health. It was at Tolstoy Farm that he finally took the vow to give up milk, which he had come to regard as a stimulant of the lower passions.<sup>1</sup> During these experiments he would easily walk forty miles a day, and once, to test his capacity, he walked fifty-five miles. Fasting for self-discipline on religious occasions was familiar to him from childhood. He extended the practice at the farm. Later, because of ill-behaviour on the part of some of the settlers at Phoenix, he undertook his first long fast for self-purification, for he believed that this could not have happened had there been no fault in himself.

For some time Gandhi had tried to persuade Gokhale to visit South Africa and study the situation for himself. A lull in the struggle occurred in 1911. Gokhale, who was then in England, conferred with the Secretary of State for India on the subject of the proposed visit and secured approval for the suggestion. But it was not until more than a year later that he was able to go, owing partly to public duties and partly to ill-health. Meanwhile, at Gandhi's desire, and with the material that was placed at his disposal from South African experience, on 4 March, 1912, he again brought up in the Imperial Legislative Council the question of the total prohibition of indentured labour recruitment. Though, as a matter of national self-respect, the non-official Indian members unanimously supported him, the resolution was rejected. It was not until 1917, as a war measure, that the Government of India were persuaded to suspend recruitment, influenced by the campaign carried on by Gandhi, and the wide support of public opinion. The evil system was at last terminated on 1 January, 1920, to Gandhi's immense relief. It had taken ten years of propaganda, initiated by him, to produce this satisfactory result.

Gokhale's arrival on 22 October, 1912, was in many respects a turning-point in South African Indian history. It was the first time that a great Indian national figure had come in direct contact with the European leaders on their own soil. He was hailed as "the coolie king," and large crowds gathered wherever he went. A great meeting

<sup>1</sup> It will be recalled that later, when he was dangerously ill in India, the doctors diagnosed malnutrition and prescribed milk, which he refused to take on account of his vow, but his wife persuaded him to take goat's milk, since his vow had reference solely to *dudh* (cow's milk).

was held in his honour at Capetown. At Kimberley, Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom and Krugersdorp, which he visited on his journey to Johannesburg, the mayors presided at the meetings of welcome. The Mayor of Johannesburg placed his car at Gokhale's disposal during his stay there. Leading Europeans met him and placed their standpoint before him. Some hundred and fifty Europeans joined a still larger number of Indians at a public vegetarian banquet. This was the first occasion on which such inter-dining had taken place. Gokhale's after-dinner address, explaining the Indian case as seen from the viewpoint of India, was a masterly and impressive performance. From the Transvaal he travelled to Natal, where he was again warmly welcomed and addressed large meetings, composed mostly of ex-indentured Indians, many of whom owed their freedom to his efforts on their behalf in 1910. Thence he returned to Pretoria, in order to discuss the situation with Botha, Smuts and the other Ministers. Gandhi, with Gokhale's consent, decided to stay away from the official conference, to avoid embarrassment both to the guest and to the Ministers. But Gokhale insisted that Gandhi should fully "brief" him, and spent the previous night in memorizing the history of the Indian community in detail. Gandhi expressly raised the question of the repeal of the £3 tax on the ex-indentured Indians and their families, not because he wished to include it in the present *satyagraha* campaign, but because, sooner or later, it would have to be raised, both on account of its serious effect on the economic conditions of the bulk of the Natal Indian population, and because of the humiliation it inflicted on the Indian community at large.

When Gokhale returned from his interview with the Ministers he told Gandhi jubilantly: "You must return to India in a year. Everything has been settled. The Black Act will be repealed. The racial bar will be removed from the immigration law. The £3 tax will be abolished." In the light of previous experience, Gandhi expressed some scepticism regarding the fulfilment of this latest undertaking on the part of the Government. Though accepting the promise as proof of the justice of the Indian demands, he felt instinctively that his return to India would not happen for some time, and not until many more Indians had gone to jail. To these doubts, Gokhale replied: "What I have told you is bound to come to pass. General Botha

promised me that the Black Act would be repealed and the £3 tax abolished. You must return to India within twelve months, and I will not have any of your excuses!" In his farewell speech at the Pretoria Town Hall, on 15 November, he gave a wide survey of Indo-European relations in the Union, and he made a final appeal to the better mind of the two communities to work for a permanent improvement of these relations. Two days later he left for India.

Gokhale was mistaken in his hopes and Gandhi justified in his doubts—but not dismayed. It was expected that the Union Government would introduce the necessary legislation to implement their pledge in the next session of Parliament. Not only did they take no steps to do so, but, though the Natal members could have been easily outvoted on this issue, Smuts excused himself in the Assembly by saying that the Natal Europeans objected to the removal of the £3 tax and the Government could not, therefore, introduce a Bill to that effect. Indeed, doubts were even publicly cast upon the existence of any pledge to do so, until Gokhale himself removed them by cabled affirmation of the pledge given to him by the Botha Cabinet. The Government's refusal to act altered the situation profoundly. It became crystal-clear to the *satyagrahis* that the programme must be enlarged to include the repeal of the £3 tax, both on account of this further breach of faith and because of the insult to India, through its great national representative, Gokhale, involved in the Government's repudiation of their undertaking. For some time, *satyagraha* had been limited to individuals. Accordingly, the indentured and ex-indentured labourers had been expressly excluded from the struggle. Now it had become impossible to prevent their joining it in a matter directly affecting their future. Meanwhile, the 1913 Union Immigrants Restriction Act, to which, in principle, the Indian community had assented, was passed. When, in the same year, a general strike of white workers was called, Gandhi suspended the *satyagraha* campaign, as he did not wish to embarrass even his opponents.

Public duty called Gokhale to London just then, and he cabled Gandhi asking that I should join him there, to help him to present the South African Indian case adequately to the British authorities. As a result of our representations, Lords Ampthill and Curzon protested in the House of Lords against the most recent developments in

the Union. The Press also took up the matter vigorously and it was clear where British sympathies lay, though, from the strictly constitutional viewpoint, nothing could be done directly where a Dominion was concerned. Meanwhile, a new development had quite unexpectedly occurred, which deeply angered the entire Indian community and outraged sentiment in the Motherland. The Cape Supreme Court, at the instance of the local authorities, delivered judgment in an Indian case to the effect that all marriages, with the exception of those celebrated according to Christian rites and monogamous marriages registered by a Registrar of Marriages, were illegal. This decision automatically invalidated marriages celebrated according to Indian religious rites. Wives of resident Indians were, in the eye of the law, reduced to the status of concubines; their children were bastardized and ceased to have the right of inheritance. Gandhi immediately drew the Government's attention to the consequences of this decision, and asked for an immediate amendment of the law for the validation of Indian marriages consecrated according to Indian religious law and custom. "The Government were not then in a mood to listen and could not see their way to comply with my request." The Passive Resistance Committee decided that resort should be had to *satyagraha*, to compel an amendment of the law as interpreted by the Supreme Court and the removal of the stigma attaching to all Indians except those of the Christian faith.

In view of the prospect of the need to fight the £3 tax, the principal *satyagrahis* had been withdrawn from Tolstoy Farm to Phoenix. Several women settlers now volunteered to challenge the decision of the Court by offering *satyagraha*. Among them was Kasturbai Gandhi, who insisted on playing her independent part now that this latest humiliation had been imposed upon the community. The women realized the risks and hardships to which they might have to submit in jail, but they were undaunted. A number entered the Transvaal or Natal without permits, in order to challenge arrest. At first, the authorities declined to take action, even when some of the women volunteers began to hawk without licences. Finally, so as to compel their arrest and imprisonment, some of them proceeded to Newcastle, the great coal-mining centre of Natal, where they advised the Indian labourers of the circumstances of the Government's refusal

to remove the £3 tax, which weighed so heavily upon so many of them, and urged them to go on strike until it was removed. The result was instantaneous. A general strike throughout the mining area was declared, and large numbers of the strikers poured into Newcastle. The women were at last arrested and sentenced, in September and October, 1913, to terms of three months' imprisonment with hard labour. In India, the fact that they were herded in jail with criminals aroused widespread anger, and the Indian women's organizations brought great pressure to bear upon the Government to urge the Imperial Government to get the Union Cabinet to reconsider the whole question.

On hearing the news of the strike, which stirred the entire Indian community to renewed activity, Gandhi at once left for Newcastle to take charge of a situation whose magnitude and difficulties he had not fully foreseen. Complaints were made to him of flogging, the cutting-off of light and water, and the removal of the strikers' household effects from their quarters by the mine officials. To deal with the needs of the thousands of refugees without shelter in Newcastle, he set up a camp for them with the help of the local Indian traders. Gandhi urged the labourers to keep the peace at all costs, and explained to them in simple language the true meaning and purpose of non-violence and *satyagraha*. Though mostly illiterate, these workers were remarkably intelligent, and promised their full cooperation. Preparations were now made to march into the Transvaal in large batches to court arrest or else to proceed to Tolstoy Farm and settle there, pending a satisfactory decision by the Union authorities. Meanwhile, Gandhi received an invitation from the coal owners, who had been greatly impressed by the suddenness and complete success of the strike, as well as by the orderliness of the strikers, to meet them in Durban. He went there without expecting much from the conference. He told the owners the history and consequences of the £3 tax, and asked them to put themselves in the place of the Indians in their determination to secure its removal. The matter, he said, was now in their hands. They could, if they so wished, make the labourers' cause their own and bring the necessary pressure to bear upon the authorities. The strike was the only weapon that the labourers had against a tax that had been imposed to enable the owners to obtain

cheap and compulsory labour. Undertaking that the strike would continue to be peaceful, Gandhi made it quite clear that he had no intention of calling it off in the circumstances that he had described.

Upon his return to Newcastle, he found that the good conduct and firmness of the strikers had produced an excellent impression upon the minor officials in touch with them, many of whom wished the movement success. Before taking final steps to start the march, he called the strikers together—they were still pouring in from all directions—and clearly explained the realities of the situation and described the hardships to come and the threats held out by the mine owners if the men did not return to work, which, he told them, they were still free to do if they so wished. Their response was prompt and unanimous. He need not fear for them. They quite understood and had complete confidence in his leadership. Accordingly, the march of some six thousand men began on 28 October. The "army" duly reached the Natal border village of Charlestown, thirty-five miles away. In order to save the marchers needless suffering and the Government unnecessary embarrassment, Gandhi wrote to the latter informing them of his plans openly to lead the marchers across the Transvaal border until Tolstoy Farm was reached. He invited mass arrest at Charlestown, but assured the Government of his willingness, if they repealed the £3 tax, to call off the strike. The labourers would then at once return to work. No reply was received. It being impossible to wait any longer, Gandhi telephoned to Smuts's secretary to inform him of the decision to enter the Transvaal immediately, notwithstanding threats of violence which had been held out against the marchers by some of the Volksrust Europeans. If, however, the General, who, presumably, did not wish such an untoward event to happen, would promise the abolition of the £3 tax, Gandhi would stop the march, as he was not anxious to break the law merely for the sake of breaking it. Within half a minute the reply came: "General Smuts will have nothing to do with you. You may do just as you please!" With that curt refusal the conversation closed.

"The straight and narrow path" now opened to Gandhi, and on 6 November, a fateful date, after prayer and dedication to God, the march across the border began. Dressed as an Indian peasant, Gandhi crossed alone, in order to confer with the police patrol



stationed on the Volksrust side. Instructions had been left that the "army" should not cross until he signalled them. But the emotional strain was too great. They rushed across and for a few moments the situation got out of hand. Gandhi, however, soon persuaded them back to discipline. The police had no orders to arrest them, and the march accordingly continued through Volksrust without incident. The situation there had been greatly eased by Kallenbach's tactful handling of a meeting at which threats had been held out against the Indians should they enter the Province. At the next stage, Gandhi was arrested and taken back to Volksrust, where he appeared before the magistrate on the charge of aiding and abetting prohibited immigrants to enter the Transvaal, knowing them to be such. As the public prosecutor was not ready to proceed and asked for a remand, Gandhi obtained bail to enable him to take the marchers, against whom no charge had been laid, to their destination. He proceeded with his "army" to Standerton and was completing the distribution of food to them when the local magistrate, in a friendly aside, informed him that he must again regard himself as being under arrest. He was charged on the same grounds as at Volksrust, and again admitted to bail pending the preparation of the case against him. Gandhi and his "army" resumed the march which, it was now generally assumed, would end at Tolstoy Farm, not more than four stages away. But the Government had become increasingly anxious regarding the handling of the invasion. The marchers had evidently been neither frightened nor disheartened, nor had they broken the peace. As an interim measure, the marchers were deported back to Natal after they had been declared prohibited immigrants. Gandhi was charged and convicted at Dundee on 11 November, and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment with hard labour. Thence he was removed to Volksrust to await trial there on the earlier charge. The only evidence against him was that which he himself provided. He was there convicted and sentenced, on 14 November, to three months' simple imprisonment, and was removed to Bloemfontein jail. The jailer was a rigid disciplinarian, but the prison doctor, who was a humanitarian, supplied Gandhi's needs as a fruitarian, even adding almonds, walnuts and Brazil nuts to his diet. The labourers were taken back to Natal without arrangement for food, and immediately prosecuted and sentenced

to imprisonment. That was what was expected and hoped for. But where were the jails to hold so many and at what cost to the State? And what about the coal mines, which were virtually closed for lack of labour? An apparently easy solution was found. The "prisoners" were taken back to the mine compounds, which were surrounded with wire-netting and proclaimed outstations of Dundee and Newcastle jails, and the European staffs were appointed as warders. The labourers were then driven underground and attempts were made to compel them to work at the coal-face. But, undismayed by flogging and other brutal acts of terrorism, they continued to refuse to work. Gandhi had warned his colleagues of the inadvisability of other large-scale movements, with few leaders left at large to help and guide the strikers. But when the news of the arrests and imprisonments spread throughout the Province, thousands of workers on the sugar estates and municipal workers in the South spontaneously left their work. The Government, now fearful of the consequences of their action and irrespective of the inherent right of workers to strike, especially against legislation directly affecting them, decided to take strong measures to compel the estate-labourers to return to work. The military police were called in, and if the labourers attempted to resist they were fired upon, many being wounded and some killed. But again the strikers refused to be cowed down before this abuse of authority.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TRIUMPH OF CONSCIENCE

**B**Y THIS TIME the movement had gained the sympathy of many Europeans, some of whom shared imprisonment with the Natal *satyagrahis*, whilst others energetically criticized the Government for mishandling a situation which could have been avoided by wiser statesmanship. One of the most prominent critics was Patrick Duncan, later the first South African to be appointed Governor-General of the Union, and who, as Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal Crown Colony Administration, had been responsible for the 1906 ordinance. In England, the Press showed increasing sympathy with the Indian cause, *The Times* declaring that the march of the Indian labourers must live in memory as one of the most remarkable manifestations in history of the spirit of passive resistance. As the news from South Africa spread in India, it aroused in all quarters bitter condemnation of the Union Government. After the internment of the principal leaders, Gokhale had been kept apprised of events almost daily by cable. He sent C. F. Andrews and William Pearson to help the Indian community. The Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, assuming the leadership of public opinion, denounced the policy and methods of the Union Government. He expressed his "deep and burning" sympathy with the *satyagrahis*, whose action he whole-heartedly defended, and whose civil disobedience of unjust and invidious legislation he supported. He demanded the appointment of a commission of inquiry. Smuts now realized the invidious position in which he had placed himself and his colleagues. It was difficult for him to retreat from his position, but he could hardly continue to flout opinion in Britain, India and among South African Liberals. It was as impossible to keep in jail thousands of innocent men and women, fighting a non-violent battle for human rights, as it was to break down the

## TRIUMPH OF CONSCIENCE

*satyagraha* movement, which had grown enormously in strength. He must do justice, but he could not take the initiative. The suggestion of a commission of inquiry came, in the circumstances, as a godsend to him.

He succeeded in appointing among the three members two who were known for their anti-Indian prejudice, and he entirely ignored Indian interests. The immediate Indian reply was that the community would have nothing to do with the Commission until the *satyagrahis* were released and unless Indian representation were agreed to. Neither of these demands was accepted; but one of the earliest recommendations of the Commission was that Gandhi, Kallenbach and I (who had been imprisoned with him) should be released unconditionally. The Government accordingly released us on 13 December. On 21 December we addressed a letter to Smuts, welcoming the appointment of the Commission, but objecting to its composition and suggesting the additional appointment of two well-known Europeans noted for their public spirit and sense of justice, asking for the release of the remainder of the *satyagrahi* prisoners and requiring permission, if evidence were to be given, to visit the mines, estates and factories where the labourers were at work. Failure to meet these requirements, we said, would result in the exploration of fresh avenues for going to jail. Smuts declined to make any new appointments, on the ground that the personnel of the Commission had been decided upon irrespective of particular interests. It was felt that there was no alternative but to prepare for a new march in order to court arrest, and it was publicly notified for 1 January, 1914. When Gokhale heard of this, he cabled that this would place the Viceroy and himself in a difficult position. He advised Gandhi to tender evidence before the Commission. This cable placed the *satyagrahi* leaders on the horns of a dilemma. They naturally did not wish to embarrass either the great national leader, in his precarious state of health, or the Viceroy, who had done so much to call attention to the unjust treatment of the Indian community. On the other hand, a pledge had been publicly taken to boycott the Commission as constituted, and it was a matter of principle for them to stand by their pledged word. By this time Andrews and Pearson had arrived, and when they understood the position they approved of a reply to this effect being sent

to Gokhale. As a result, both he and Hardinge were convinced that, in the circumstances, the *satyagrahis* could do no other.

Three events then occurred in quick succession, which helped to resolve the new crisis. The first was the outbreak of a strike of European railway workers, almost coinciding with the date appointed for the resumption of the *satyagraha* march. Gandhi at once announced the decision of the leaders to postpone the march until the strike had ended, as they had no desire to harass the Government by exploiting difficulties unrelated to the struggle. To have done otherwise would have been contrary to the principles of *satyagraha*. Even when the sugar-estate labourers had gone on strike, hundreds of them had returned to work solely to save the cut sugar cane and bring it to the mills for crushing. When the Indian employees of the Durban Municipality struck work, those engaged in the sanitary services or as attendants on hospital patients willingly returned to their duties. Such cases of chivalry left their invisible impress everywhere, enhanced the prestige of the Indians and prepared the way for a settlement. The second event was Smuts's acceptance of Gandhi's request for an interview. One of his secretaries told him jocularly: "I do not like your people, and do not care to assist them at all. But what am I to do? You help us in our days of need. How can we lay hands upon you? I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers, and then we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone and never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry. And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness." Smuts also gave expression to similar sentiments. He was willing to meet Gandhi in most respects, but could not accept special representation on the Commission for the Indian community, as this would injure the Government's prestige and make it impossible to carry out the desired reforms. Moreover, the two political members of the Commission were unlikely to take a line different from the Government and would almost certainly make favourable recommendations, which the Government would then carry out. If formal evidence were not tendered, it would be impossible to deal with charges of ill-treatment of the Indian strikers. Gandhi, whose view was that a *satyagrahi* ought to suffer rather than complain, was inclined to advise his

people not to pursue the matter provided the obnoxious laws were repealed or suitably amended.

He was encouraged in this decision by the third event, the arrival of Sir Benjamin Robertson, who had been sent by the Viceroy to act as an official intermediary between the two Governments. He and, in an unofficial capacity, Andrews rendered great service in interpreting the Indian viewpoint to Smuts and the Commission. Gandhi and his colleagues rendered them every assistance. After a further interview with Smuts, Gandhi wrote to him on 21 January, explaining once more the reasons for the Indian unwillingness to cooperate directly with the Commission or adduce evidence before it, but also recording his appreciation of the Government's more friendly attitude to Indian representations. He assured the General that, pending the decisions of the Commission, the community would continue to assist the Viceroy's delegate and refrain from rendering the Government's position more difficult by a revival of passive resistance. He reminded Smuts of the need, with the suspension of *satyagraha*, to release *satyagrahi* prisoners, emphasizing that the points on which relief was sought were to include repeal of the £3 tax, legalization of marriages celebrated according to the rites of the Indian religions, the entry of educated Indians and an assurance that the existing laws specially affecting Indians would be administered justly and with due regard to vested rights. To this Smuts replied recognizing the difficulty which prevented Indian evidence before the Commission, but repudiating the charges of harsh treatment of the Indian strikers. As regards the *satyagrahi* prisoners, he wrote, their discharge had already been ordered before Gandhi's letter arrived. The Government would await the recommendations of the Commission before taking further action.

Gandhi, who regarded the provisional agreement thus reached as proper in the circumstances, had some difficulty in persuading his colleagues to accept it, in view of the manner in which previous pacts had been disregarded by the Government. He reminded his questioners that a true *satyagrahi* must always attribute the better rather than the worse motive to his opponent, at whatever the risk and cost. Distrust, he said, was a sign of weakness, not of strength. At last he convinced them that, with Andrews and Robertson as

witnesses, it was highly improbable that the provisional agreement would be violated by the Government. His confidence was justified by the Commission's report, which, while criticizing the Indians for their non-cooperation and dismissing charges of brutality in the absence of reliable evidence, recommended the passing of legislation adopting all the Indian demands for redress. The community accordingly received an assurance that a Bill implementing these recommendations would shortly be introduced. Soon the Indians Relief Bill was brought forward, embodying the Indian demands, and passed in a friendly spirit by the Union Parliament. Administrative matters not dealt with by the Act were settled in correspondence between Gandhi and Smuts. They included the right of educated Indians to enter Cape Province from other provinces; permission for "specially exempted" educated Indians to enter South Africa; recognition of the status of educated Indians who had entered the Union during the past three years; and the entry of existing plural wives (very few in number) to join their husbands.

After dealing with these points, Smuts, in a letter dated 30 June, added: "With regard to the administration of existing laws, it has always been and will continue to be the desire of the Government to see that they are administered in a just manner and with due regard to vested rights." To this Gandhi replied:

"The passing of the Indians Relief Bill and this correspondence have finally closed the *satyagraha* struggle which commenced in September, 1906, and which to the Indian community cost much physical suffering and pecuniary loss, and to the Government much anxious thought and consideration.

"As you are aware, some of my countrymen have wished me to go further. They are dissatisfied that the Trade Licence Laws of the different Provinces, the Transvaal Gold Law, the Transvaal Townships Act and the Transvaal Law 3 of 1885 have not been altered so as to give them full rights of residence, trade and ownership of land. Some of them are dissatisfied that full inter-Provincial migration is not permitted, and some are dissatisfied that on the marriage question the Relief Bill goes no further than it does. They have asked me that all the above matters might be included in the *satyagraha* struggle. I have been unable to comply

with their wishes. Whilst, therefore, they have not been included in the programme of *satyagraha*, it will not be denied that some day or other these matters will require further and sympathetic consideration by the Government. Complete satisfaction cannot be expected until full civic rights are conceded to the resident Indian population. I have told my countrymen that they will have to exercise patience, and by all honourable means at their disposal educate public opinion, so as to enable the Government of the day to go further than the present correspondence does. I shall hope that when the Europeans of South Africa fully appreciate the fact that now the importation of indentured labour from India is prohibited, and the Immigrants Regulation Act of last year has in practice all but stopped further free Indian immigration, and that my countrymen do not entertain any political ambition, they, the Europeans, will see the justice and, indeed, the necessity, of my countrymen being granted the rights I have just referred to. Meanwhile, if the generous spirit that the Government have applied to the treatment of the problem during the last few months continues to be applied, as promised in your letter, in the administration of the existing laws, I am quite certain that the Indian community throughout the Union will be able to enjoy some measure of peace and never be a source of trouble to the Government."

The settlement was welcomed as an act of statesmanship by the Viceroy. In a speech at Johannesburg, Viscount Gladstone, the Governor-General, pointed out that it indicated that the existence of a free, responsible South African Government was not inconsistent with the discharge of Imperial obligations. The Commission's report and recommendations, he said, had unified public opinion and enabled the Government to find a satisfactory solution. The new measure was not only an act of justice but, in the Imperial interest, an urgent necessity. No true South African interest had been subordinated to Imperial considerations, but the Imperial responsibility was recognized. As His Majesty's representative he had given his official consent to the Bill with a very deep sense of gratitude to the Union Government and the Union Parliament. There is little doubt that the Governor-General in making these observations, and the Union



Government in taking this action, had had regard to the growing threat to peace by Imperial Germany and the probability that both South Africa and India would be drawn into the impending war.

So the eight years' struggle came to an end with the victory of the *satyagrahis* after immense suffering and sacrifice, and with great honour to its redoubtable and unflinching leader, Gandhi. He now desired to return to his Motherland. He felt an intense urge to wean his countrymen from their fear of the foreigner, and give them confidence in their own inherent strength for freedom. But this could be possible only if my wife and I would reverse our decision, taken for family reasons, to return to England when the struggle was over. He pointed out that he and I, as his closest colleague throughout the struggle, could not both leave South Africa at that juncture. One or other of us must remain to see that the settlement was honourably implemented. This argument was irresistible, and I yielded. What might have been the history of events had our earlier arrangement been carried out and Gandhi had himself remained is a matter of conjecture.

Several public farewell meetings were held, in which many European sympathizers participated. Gandhi paid a heartfelt tribute to the *satyagrahis* for their indomitable courage, to those who had died or had been ruined in the struggle, and to his closest associates, both Indian and European. Having sent the younger members of his family direct to India, he and Mrs. Gandhi sailed on 18 July, 1914, for England, to meet Gokhale there and consult him about future plans. He arrived in London on the day before the First World War opened.

Thus ended one period of an amazing career; thus opened another period, which was to be perhaps even more remarkable.

# THE MIDDLE YEARS

1915-1939

By H. N. BRAILSFORD

*H. N. Brailsford is a Yorkshireman, born in 1873, and educated at Glasgow University, where he was assistant to the Professor of Logic. It has conferred on him the Degree of LL.D. In 1897 he fought as a volunteer in the Greek Foreign Legion. He served as leader-writer successively on the Manchester Guardian, Daily News, Nation and New Statesman, and edited the New Leader (1922-26). His books include The War of Steel and Gold; Property or Peace?; Shelley, Godwin and their Circle; Voltaire; Rebel India and Subject India. A Socialist and an Internationalist, he has been for many years an advocate of India's independence. On visits to India and during the Round Table Conference in London he got to know Gandhi.*

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE RETURN TO INDIA

ON 9 January, 1915, after a short stay in London, Gandhi landed in Bombay. Round the arch of the Apollo Bunder a crowd of old friends and new admirers welcomed him to India with garlands of flowers, and an imposing reception was held to do him honour. His coming was an event. His name was already a household word, and among the notable Indians of his day his position was unique. In a cause that every Indian felt as his own, he had brought the Government of a great Dominion to terms, and won for his people a victory that enhanced their self-respect.

The newcomer, at the age of forty-six, was at the height of his powers, and he brought with him a clear-cut philosophy of life and a political technique which had proved its efficacy in action. Both were new, precisely because they were old and native to India's soil. This

man, who stepped ashore wearing his Gujarati costume, thought and spoke in language familiar to the people. He was not, as so many of the leaders of the past generation had been, a Europeanized Indian. He had, indeed, learned much from Ruskin and Tolstoy, but it was not from such sources that Indians had hitherto drawn the wisdom of the West; these teachers were in revolt against all its accepted values. Nor was it a foreign doctrine that Gandhi had absorbed from them. Rather had they helped him to rediscover the traditions of his own people. Instinctively Indians may have realized that a new spiritual force had come among them. Soon after his arrival, in a published letter, the poet Rabindranath Tagore conferred on him the title of "Mahatma," of which the literal meaning is "great soul." It is the custom among Indians to bestow such distinctions on leaders whom they love and admire, and this title was promptly adopted.

In its turn also, the Government of India welcomed Gandhiji<sup>1</sup> with a high honour in the New Year's list of 1915. For his services in South Africa, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, conferred on this rebel and jail-bird the Kaisar-i-Hind gold medal. On the advice of his revered friend and teacher, Gokhale, whom we have already met in South Africa, Gandhi's first step on arriving in Bombay was to pay a call on the Governor, Lord Willingdon, afterwards Viceroy. The Governor asked and received from him a promise of personal consultation "whenever he proposed to take any steps concerning government." This incident is typical of Gandhi's unswerving loyalty at the time. During his stay in London, in the first days of the World War, he repeated the action he had taken twice already in South Africa. He called the Indian community together and proposed that they should form an ambulance corps for service at the front. He would have led his unit in the field had he not contracted, during their exercises in inclement weather, a severe attack of pleurisy, which obliged him to seek the warmer climate of India.

The explanations Gandhi gave for his loyalty are deeply interesting. He "allied himself to the British Government" because, under it, it was possible for him to claim "equal partnership" with all its subjects. "I do not," he insisted, "belong to a subject race." On another occasion he said that "the British Empire had certain ideals with

<sup>1</sup> The syllable -ji conveys affection and respect.



*Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Sir T. B. Pattani and Gandhi at St. James's Palace for the Round Table Conference, 1931*



(TOP) *Gandhi spinning*

(BOTTOM) *Federal Structure Committee of the Indian Round Table Conference London, 1931. On Gandhi's left is Pandit Malaviya; on his right, Viscount Sankey, Sir Samuel Hoare (now Lord Templewood), Lord Peel, the Rt. Hon. Wedgwood Benn (now Lord Stansgate), Mr. (now Lord) Pethick-Lawrence*



which he had fallen in love." One of them is that each of its subjects has "the freest scope possible for his energies and honour, and whatever he thinks is due to his conscience." This, he thought, was true of the British, as of no other, government. "I am no lover," he concluded, "of any government, and I have more than once said that that government is best which governs least. And I have found that it is possible for me to be governed least under the British Empire. Hence my loyalty to the British Empire." He described himself as "a determined opponent of modern civilization," but he maintained that Indians could reject the culture of their European rulers "without having to reject the rulers themselves." It is significant that Gandhi should have applauded the British rulers of his country for that tendency to *laissez faire* which the younger Indian generation afterwards condemned as a proof of Britain's indifference to India's welfare.

The reasons which moved Gandhiji to his generous act of loyalty were typical of his chivalry. In London he rejected the arguments of those who saw in Britain's danger India's opportunity. British rule, he replied, might be faulty, but it was "not intolerable." He thought it more becoming not to drive a bargain, nor to press India's demands so long as the war lasted. "If we would improve our status through the help and cooperation of the British, it was our duty to win their help by standing by them in their hour of need." So he had argued during the Boer and Zulu wars, and so he argued now. This was not a far-sighted calculation; nor did Gandhi in any of these three cases pay much attention to the merits of the British case. He acted on an impulse of neighbourly sympathy towards a people whose destinies were intimately linked with India's.

There now began for Gandhi a period of exploration. Save for two brief visits, he had been absent from India for twenty years. Much had happened during his long absence. The country had suffered the impact of Lord Curzon's masterful personality. Bengal had revolted against partition and had recovered her unity. Some terrorism there had been, and an economic boycott was adopted against imported British goods. Lord Morley had taken timid steps towards a limited form of self-government, and the slow process of industrialization was hastened by the war.

The National Congress still met annually, as it had done since

1885, to focus Indian opinion, though without any form of official recognition. It had been split since 1907 by a sharp feud between its victorious moderates under G. K. Gokhale and its extremists, who had seceded with B. G. Tilak at their head. It spoke for the intelligentsia, and conducted its proceedings in English. The peasant masses, Hindu and Muslim alike, stood aloof, absorbed in the struggle for a bare subsistence. The Muslim middle class, who were rarely roused by any but a communal issue, took little interest in its doings. The few of them who adhered to Congress may have amounted to a tenth of its membership, whereas Muslims formed a quarter of India's population. The more conservative and less critical elements among them had in 1906 formed their own communal organization, the Muslim League, which Lord Minto, the Viceroy of those days, patronized.

The allegiance of politically conscious Hindus was divided at this time between the two veteran leaders, Gokhale and Tilak. Both were Brahmins of a peculiarly distinguished sub-caste. Both were descended from governing families of the Mahrattas, who shared with the Sikhs military ascendancy over Northern and Central India in the early days of the British conquest. Both men were scholars; Tilak was a mathematician; Gokhale shone in the modern science of economics. It is significant that Tilak wrote in prison a daring and original essay on the far northern home of the Aryans, based on astronomical data embodied in the Vedic hymns. For the rest, the two men were sharply contrasted in temperament and outlook. Tilak was a born fighter, who believed in wresting freedom from the British by mobilizing a steadily growing pressure against them. A passionate orator, he was twice convicted of sedition, and served a sentence of six years' deportation. Gokhale, scrupulous in all he said and wrote, relied on persuasion. He bowed, as I have heard him say with a smile of resignation, to "the inscrutable dispensation of Providence" which placed India within the British Empire. His aim, a rather distant goal, was "colonial self-government." Tilak was less patient over the pace and always spoke of "Home Rule," which he hoped to get from Parliament through a Bill on the Irish model.

It was over methods that they differed. For Tilak, Gokhale's tactics of persuasion constituted "mendicancy." Gokhale was a Liberal, a

progressive and a rationalist. Tilak, an orthodox Hindu, idealized the past and stood, like Gandhi, on the defensive against westernization, but unlike him defended such social institutions as child-marriage. Tilak will live in history, thanks to his vitality and courage. Never in a long lifetime have I met another man who won, as Gokhale did, the veneration of all who knew him by his blend of gentleness and serenity with wisdom and strength. Gandhi regarded Gokhale as his *guru*—friend, teacher and father confessor. Tilak he honoured, but found him as unapproachable as a Himalayan peak.

In his rediscovery of India, Gandhi's first journey was to Poona to sit at Gokhale's feet. Here were the headquarters of the Servants of India, an Order which this sage had founded, consisting (though it had many adherents and supporters) of only a dozen carefully chosen men, pledged "to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit." Their vows bound them to earn no money for themselves; to submit to the guidance of the Order; to regard all Indians as brothers irrespective of caste or creed; to engage in no personal quarrels.

After a novitiate, each member received Rs.50 a month (£3 8s. 6d.) for himself and his family. Each Servant, under the direction of the Order, devoted himself to some form of social work. One served the helpless Hindu child-widows, forbidden to remarry, by training them as teachers or midwives. Another lived among the aboriginal tribes; a third worked for the Untouchables; a fourth helped the workers of Bombay to form their trade unions; a fifth edited their weekly paper. Their spirit was, indeed, "religious" in the sense that they served all God's children with selfless devotion, but it was also scientific. The only possession of which they were proud was their library, devoted to books on sociology and economics.

Gokhale wished to enlist Gandhi in his Order, and to enter it was his own desire. Had he succeeded, the history of India in the next thirty years would have run on different lines, for the Order would not have sanctioned the policies and tactics he eventually adopted. But some of the Servants, though they respected him, were opposed to his admission, for they realized, more clearly than he did himself, the wide differences between his outlook and theirs. They were not opponents of western civilization, nor were they orthodox Hindus.



## THE MIDDLE YEARS

Strict though their ethical code was, it was not based on asceticism. They shrank, moreover, from any emotional appeal to the masses, and stood for cooperation with India's British rulers.

Gokhale, for long a sick man, died within ten days of Gandhi's visit to Poona. When the latter returned for the funeral, he took the decision to withdraw his application for membership, since he did not wish to be elected by a divided vote. The Servants, none the less, helped him in his social work, which in some measure was inspired by their model. It was they who financed him when, as we shall see, he set up his own *ashram*.<sup>1</sup> Their political tendencies were clearly revealed five years later when, under their new leader, Srinivasa Sastri, they quitted Congress after its resort to non-cooperation, and formed the small but distinguished Liberal Party. One result of Gandhi's visit to Poona has still to be mentioned. Gokhale bound him by a promise to spend his first year in India in looking about him, and to take no political action until it was over.

In many journeys Gandhiji began to observe with critical eyes the unfamiliar Indian scene. After Poona, he went to Santiniketan in Bengal, where on his inherited estate Rabindranath Tagore had built up a community that reflected the poet's outlook on life. No one welcomed Gandhi's return to India more eagerly than Tagore, and the two were always united by a link of personal affection. But in their attitude to life these men were poles apart. Tagore came of a brilliant and cultured family, which was a pillar of the Brahmo Samaj, a church of reformers which stood to orthodox Hinduism much as the Unitarians stand to orthodox Christianity. The leader of the Bengali literary renaissance, a poet in two languages, novelist, painter and musician, beauty was for him what truth was for Gandhi. Self-respect made him in his own way a nationalist; but he would not impoverish himself by rejecting western culture, as Gandhi did. In a spirit that resembled Goethe's, he was a cosmopolitan, and one of his chief aims was to build up at Santiniketan an international college of research, to which Chinese students were especially welcomed. His ambition was to bring about a true marriage between the cultures of East and West. He served the peasants by scientific experiments in agriculture.

<sup>1</sup> The word denotes the house of any community bound in a common life by religious discipline; the nearest equivalent is "monastery."

At first these two great Indians met without a conscious clash, but later, when Gandhi took his stand for non-cooperation, Tagore opposed him in a moving letter of remonstrance.

After a visit to Rajkot and his own homeland of Gujerat, Gandhi travelled north to Hardwar, to witness the pilgrimage that gathers there every twelfth year on the sacred banks of the Ganges. There were assembled over a million pilgrims, and from their behaviour at the fair, as they feasted, chaffered and amused themselves, Gandhi received a painful shock. Was this Indian piety, he asked himself. And then he reacted, as he always did, when the failings of his own countrymen distressed him: "I must impose some act of self-denial on myself . . . in atonement for the iniquity prevailing there" (at Hardwar). Accordingly, he took the vow, which he observed through the rest of his life, never to take more than five articles of food (including medicines) in twenty-four hours, and never to eat after dark. To understand this incident is to understand Gandhi. Of all men he demanded the highest conduct, but when they fell short, such was his sense of solidarity with them that he punished not them but himself.

At the Gurukula *ashram*, where some of his South African disciples had been received, he was more at home. It belonged to the Arya Samaj, Hindu reformers, Protestants who have gone back to the pure word of their sacred books. Here, though he professed his own orthodoxy, he dwelt on the tolerance of Hinduism, which can reconcile all its many sects. Among these friends he was involved in a revealing argument because he did not wear the sacred thread. He had worn it with pride in his younger days, until he realized that custom and orthodoxy forbade its use to the fourth and lowest group of castes, the Sudras, and, of course, to the still lower group, the Untouchables. Against this system of privilege his conscience revolted.

Wherever he went in his travels, multitudes thronged him to draw virtue from the sight of a saint. He used his opportunities to talk frankly about the shadows he observed on the Indian landscape. It was not the colour and vivacity of its crowded life that impressed him, but its squalor and its poverty. These speeches of his were fully reported and widely discussed. Sometimes he talked about the neglect of sanitation and gave practical advice about the removal of filth.

On principle he always rode by train in the third class, and he published descriptions of the dirt and the inhuman overcrowding to which the poorer travellers were subjected. In his later years, the Government would charter a special train of third-class carriages for him, to avoid the delays caused by the multitudes who thronged him; but for many a year he shared all the miseries of the masses on his frequent journeys by day and night. Again, he would talk plainly of what he had seen in a temple in the sacred city of Benares—the slums around it, the dirt and “the avaricious priest.” He would pour scorn on the superstition of Hindus who dared not accept a cup of cold water from the hands of a Muslim. Once, at a public meeting in Benares, he drew a protest from some rajahs who sat on the platform by his descriptions of the gorgeous display of jewellery he had witnessed at a ceremony on the previous day. “I feel like saying to these noblemen: ‘There is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of this jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen.’”

So in these first two years Gandhi went on popularizing his ideas, while still abstaining from political action. To this rule there was one exception. He worked hard to secure the total abolition of indentured emigration. It had come to an end in Natal, but the degrading system still survived in other colonies, though the war had stopped the actual export of this servile labour. Gandhi made up his mind that this abuse must be abolished by a definite date, and he chose 31 May, 1917. Should he fail, he meant to adopt *satyagraha*. But in fact the thing was easy. Gandhi addressed a series of demonstrations all the way from Karachi to Calcutta. The Viceroy, now Lord Chelmsford, received the Mahatma in audience; an influential deputation of Indian women completed his conversion. And so, before the chosen date arrived, this evil was abolished.<sup>1</sup>

In this preliminary period of rediscovery, Gandhi attended the two annual meetings of Congress at Bombay and Lucknow in the last weeks of 1915 and 1916, but took no prominent part in the debates. Congress was not yet the power it soon became, but in two respects its prospects were improving. The quarrel between Moderates and Extremists was ended, and a promising measure of cooperation with

<sup>1</sup> In fact it ended in 1917, though the formal abolition was completed on 1 January, 1920.

the Muslim League achieved. The really vigorous agitation for freedom was carried on during the war years not by Congress, but by two Home Rule Leagues, one of them headed by Tilak, the other by Mrs. Besant, the Theosophist. Hers was a personality as dynamic as it was original. Enthroned as a prophetess in her own community, she expected submission and often received it; her relations with Gandhi were never easy. Her two gifts to the Indian nationalist movement were her admiration (uncritical though it was) of India's ancient culture, and her introduction of European standards of efficiency in organization.

The Muslim League, meanwhile, had since 1913, as a friendly gesture, held its annual gathering in the same city as Congress; the two were now parallel organizations. Between them they had worked out a pact, which both organizations adopted at Lucknow. Congress conceded the Muslim claim for separate communal electorates, and a compromise was reached, which fixed in percentages the share of representation each community should enjoy in the central and provincial legislatures of the future. The pact included a rather vague sketch of the next instalment of self-government which the two organizations were agreed in demanding; it meant a big step forward, but it was, none the less, a moderate scheme, which did not differ fundamentally from the coming Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. India, in the mood that prevailed at Lucknow, midway in the war, could have been reconciled to the Commonwealth by wise British statesmanship with the greatest ease.

## CHAPTER IX

### HIS WAY OF LIFE

**I**N ASIA, the chief gift to mankind of every teacher, Hindu, Buddhist or Confucian, was always a "path," a "way of life." As his disciples gathered round him, they followed it in his *ashram* and went out to carry it to the world. Gandhiji lost no time in creating his own community. He fixed it in his own home country of Gujarat, whose peasants he could address in their own language. In May, 1915, he settled at a place called Kochrab. A year later he moved to a more suitable site on the banks of the River Sabarmati, close to the great textile centre of Ahmedabad. One reason that influenced his choice was that Gujarat, from time immemorial, has grown cotton, and that spinning and weaving still survived there as handicrafts, in spite of the proximity of the power-mills. From the start Gandhi was resolved not to countenance the curse of untouchability. The sincerity of his disciples was soon put to the test. A Servant of India, A. V. Thakkar, inquired whether they would receive an untouchable family as inmates. The man was a humble village teacher and with him were his wife and their little girl. They agreed, but even among them there was tension and sometimes quarrelling, as they defied every rule of their religion by eating with these out-castes. Some of their neighbours were in revolt, because the well was contaminated by the unclean presence of the untouchable family. Worse still, the gifts from friends, on which the *ashram* in its early days relied, began to fall off and at last ceased altogether. There were threats of a social boycott and their till was empty. Gandhi was about to move to the untouchable quarter of the neighbouring city, where they could have lived by manual labour, when a stranger drove up to the door in his car and asked if the *ashram* needed help. Next day, at the hour fixed, he came again, placed Rs.13,000 (£975) in notes in Gandhi's hands and drove away.

In 1930 I saw something of this *ashram*, though the Mahatma's inspiring presence was absent, for he was then an inmate of Yeravda jail. I found it hard to think of this place as a monastery, though it had its discipline and its rules. It was rather an immense patriarchal family, which had grown up around its spiritual father—for this ("Bapu") was the name of endearment which everyone in it gave to Gandhiji. There were women and children among its inmates, even husbands and wives, though these lived under the vow of chastity. There were gardens to till and beasts to tend, while everyone performed his obligatory task at the spinning-wheel. It was a village which prayed and worked and ate in common, under a rule so simple and kindly that it soon became second nature. This was no permanent Order, which will transmit a fixed tradition to the generations to come. This *ashram* was rather a retreat, to which men came for teaching and inspiration, spending a formative time under Gandhi's guidance, that they might go out, fired by his spirit, to work for India. Seldom have men of refinement and intelligence reduced life to such elementary simplicity as in this place. European monks rarely detached themselves so completely from the world of the senses. The Christian monastery rejoiced—as Buddhists also did—in architecture and painting, and wove for God's glory elaborate patterns of sound. Gandhi's disciples, when they turn to God, achieve a total abstraction. There was nothing in this *ashram* to please, or even to interest the eye, unless it were the trees. The dwellings of its inmates were bare huts or cells of the simplest construction, in which one found only the peasant beds of cords stretched over a bamboo frame, and a vessel or two for drinking and washing. Gandhi's cell contained, indeed, two or three dozen books, but they were a random collection, which gave no clue to his mind. One bows with respect before the austerity which can be content with this extreme simplicity. But is it wholly admirable? This Indian road to God narrows and empties the universe. It achieves unity too easily by omission.

In the long refectory we squatted round the walls to eat the simple but sufficient vegetarian meal—the usual Indian arrangement, which does not facilitate conversation—while the younger inmates served us. A European can grasp with his mind the tense drama of this family meal, but what must it have meant to the nerves of Hindus?

An Untouchable girl handled with the rest the water and the food. They risked Hell at every sip. To sit down, all castes and out-castes together, was to join in a sacrament that affirmed India's unity.

As evening fell, the inmates of the *ashram* assembled in a sandy clearing beside the river bank for prayer. The night was fragrant and still. Men, women and children brought with them an atmosphere of joy. It was for them the happiest hour of the day. One felt an expectant hush, as the musician took his place to lead the singing with his Indian harp. I wished I could have understood the long hymns from the *Bhagavad Gita*, but something I guessed from the look of ecstasy and oblivion that crept over these sensitive faces as they sang. I did not feel wholly outside this family circle, foreigner though I was. Its spirit was peace and love.

Gandhiji's way of life was defined in the vows all the inmates of the *ashram* were required to take. He did not regard them as discipline suited only to the elect who have renounced the world. They summed up the essentials of morality as he understood it, and formed an ideal which all men should strive to follow.<sup>1</sup>

The first rule is a vow to speak the truth in all circumstances. It was not scientific truth that Gandhi valued so highly, but social truth in all our dealings with our neighbours. He insisted on complete frankness in daily intercourse, and condemned the insincerities practised in the name of politeness. Indians, he said, are peculiarly shy of saying "No." They must learn to say it boldly, when they mean it.

This stress on literal truth-telling belongs also to the Quaker tradition, and it reappears in the anarchist moralists, Godwin and Tolstoy. Gandhi would, on occasion, describe himself as an anarchist. Godwin was particularly severe in denouncing stratagems, even in warfare. The laws of truth ruled out secrecy, surprises and anything savouring of conspiratorial methods in Gandhi's political campaigns.

The second rule in Gandhi's way of life was the practice of *ahimsa*, illustrated in his doings in South Africa. As we have seen, for him the idea was positive; it enjoins, first of all, charity towards those who consider themselves our enemies. Enemies we cannot have, if we practise *ahimsa*. But if others feel enmity towards us, even of them "we

<sup>1</sup> I have based this account, by way of summary and quotation, on Gandhi's address in Madras on 16 February, 1916. *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 316-330.

may not harbour an evil thought." We may not even resent their actions, though we are not obliged to acquiesce in what they do. To achieve this ideal, he used to say, will cost us many sleepless nights. But once we come near achieving it the whole world is at our feet. "If you express your love—*ahimsa*—in such a manner that it impresses itself indelibly upon your so-called enemy, he must return that love."

Gandhi had to answer the questions with which every pacifist has to wrestle. If we renounce violence, how are we to guard the honour of precious lives committed to our charge? His answer was Tolstoy's. By violent resistance you will only increase the aggressor's wrath, and when he has done you to death, he will wreak his anger upon your charge. "But if you do not retaliate, but stand your ground between your charge and the opponent, simply receiving the blows without retaliating, what happens? I give you my promise that the whole of the violence will be expended on you, and your charge will be left unscathed." Gandhi would, on occasion, quote the familiar stanzas from Shelley's *Masque of Anarchy*:

With folded arms and steady eyes,  
And little fear, and less surprise,  
Look upon them as they slay  
Till their rage has died away.

Then they will return with shame  
To the place from which they came,  
And the blood thus shed will speak  
In hot blushes on their cheek.

But with Gandhi's views on war we are not yet concerned.

The third vow was one of celibacy. "Those who want to perform national service, or those who want to have a glimpse of the real religious life, must lead a celibate life, no matter if married or unmarried." The peculiarity of Gandhi's extreme asceticism in matters of sex was that he did not discountenance marriage; indeed, he held it to be an indissoluble bond of intimate friendship between a man and a woman "never to be parted in this life, or in the lives that are to come." But he would not admit that "our lusts" should enter into it.



Like Tolstoy, he held that sexual intercourse was morally permissible only for the express purpose of procreating children. Even this was forbidden in the *ashram*. Birth control save by abstinence he stoutly opposed.<sup>1</sup> I doubt whether this rule of chastity was in accord with Hindu tradition. The continence the latter enjoined was a duty imposed on young men before marriage. The begetting of an heir to carry on the ritual for one's ancestors was an obligation imposed on every householder. As the art of the old temples shows, the Hindu attitude to sex was frank, happy and uninhibited.

The fourth vow was "to control the palate." Continually Gandhi inveighed against elaborate cooking, and especially against the use of stimulating condiments. We should eat only what is "necessary for the proper maintenance of our physical health." The law of *ahimsa*, of course, prescribed a strictly vegetarian diet. Tea, coffee and tobacco were condemned as well as alcohol. Gandhi's negative attitude to food is puzzling to a European, until one realizes that it was a reaction against the Hindu pre-occupation with the intricate rules of ceremonial purity and the rituals bound up with caste, which govern every detail in the preparation of food and the handling of water in an orthodox household.

The fifth rule was the "vow of non-thieving." This sounds delusively simple, until one realizes that it involves a revolutionary attitude to property. Gandhiji came near to saying, with Proudhon, that "property is theft." "If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use and keep it, I thief from somebody else." Here he came very near to the Socialist maxim: "To each according to his needs; from each according to his capacity." So long as there is poverty and starvation in the world, "so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are thieving." After making, by implication, this claim for equality, Gandhi went on to say that he was no Socialist. He did not want to dispossess anyone, for that would involve a departure from the rule of *ahimsa*. Sometimes, in the spirit of the Gospels, he urged the rich to sell all they had and give to the poor; sometimes he fell back on the more conventional view of many Christian teachers and of Ruskin, that they should administer their wealth as trustees for the poor. While others starved, Gandhi would enjoy

<sup>1</sup> See also p. 217.

nothing with which he could dispense. "If somebody also possesses more than I do, let him. But so far as my own life has to be regulated, I do say that I dare not possess anything which I do not want. In India we have got three millions of people having to be satisfied with one meal a day, and that meal consisting of a *chapatti* containing no fat in it, and a pinch of salt. You and I have no right to anything that we really have, until these three millions are clothed and fed better. You and I, who ought to know better, must adjust our wants, and even undergo voluntary starvation, in order that they may be nursed, fed and clothed." Again and again he recurred to this fundamental rule, and to it he often added the statement that the rich were living on the exploitation of the poor. That is why he cut down his wants to the barest necessities and dressed in a homespun blanket and a loin-cloth. And that, among other reasons, was why he daily spun his allotted quantity of yarn. "Why," as he asked in his open letter to Tagore (13 October, 1921), "must I spin ? Because I am eating what does not belong to me. I am living on the spoliation of my countrymen. Trace the source of every coin that finds its way into your pocket and you will realize the truth of what I write. Everyone must spin. Let Tagore spin, like the others." He would not claim that a preacher or a poet was "worthy of his hire." He exempted no one from the rule that each must earn his bread by the labour of his hands.

The sixth vow of "non-attachment" (a better translation than "non-possession") enjoined the extinction of desire for the things of this life. The seventh is a vow of poverty. We should keep only what is strictly necessary for our bodily wants, and think constantly of simplifying life. Gandhi was neither artist nor poet; he did not visualize his sister Poverty and love her, as St. Francis of Assisi did. But how near together these two were, in their embrace of poverty and in their whole way of life ! Both simplified it; both laboured with their hands; both eschewed violence, even in self-defence; both preached charity and love to all created things, among them the wolf. St. Francis, who preached to the birds, would have understood Gandhi's veneration for the cow.

There follow a number of rules or vows, which have a special application to the needs and duties of Indians today, though I think that Gandhi regarded them as universally valid. The first of them is

the vow of *swadeshi*. The word means "made in, or belonging to, one's own country," and the rule is to use only such goods. The term came into common use before Gandhi's return to India, during the struggle against the partition of Bengal. The boycott of British goods was one of several methods of pressure and retaliation, and the idea lived on because it suited the economic nationalism of the rising industrial middle class. Gandhi, however, gave it a wider sense and strove to rid it of the taint of hostility and xenophobia. Its background in his mind was the idealized tradition of the Indian village community, which lay at the roots of all his social and political thinking. These villages were republics, each governed by a council of elders (*panchayat*) which interpreted and applied its customary law. The village led its own secluded life in peace, while emperors and rajahs battled for the right to tax it. In the simplicity of its economic life it was almost entirely self-sufficient. Each had its village servants, craftsmen who were paid for their work by receiving a share of the crops grown by their peasant neighbours. Among these "servants" there would be a smith, a carpenter, a potter, a barber and a sweeper.

I have heard old men describe this system, which sometimes included a periodic sharing out of the common land to ensure equality. To this ideal Gandhi wished to return, gradually and as nearly as he could. *Swadeshi* meant, for him, first of all this conception of self-sufficiency, and one's duty to employ one's neighbours. The illustration he gave, to make his meaning clear, was that of the village barber. "You are bound to support your village barber, to the exclusion of the finished barber who may come to you from Madras." The same rule of "my neighbour first" he applied to India as a whole. "So when we find that there are many things that we cannot get in India, we must try to do without them. . . . Once we adopt this *swadeshi* rule of life, a burden will roll off our backs and, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, we shall go on our way rejoicing, freer than we were."

This version of *swadeshi* has little in common with the contemporary European practice of self-sufficiency or autarky. In the life of that continent this had a wholly different motive or justification. Some countries, like Nazi Germany, adopted it for strategic reasons: they feared a blockade, and they had to do without imported butter, because they wanted guns. Others, again, were driven to cut down

imports, because they were burdened with debt. In both cases the policy was a symptom of a disordered world. In Gandhi's *swadeshi* there is no suggestion of hostility to the outer world. What may be said with some approach to truth is that he ignores it; he does not need what it has to offer. By simplifying her life, India can supply all her own wants, as she so nearly did in the old days before the Europeans set up their trading factories on her shores.

This is the economic meaning of *swadeshi*, but for Gandhiji the roots of the idea lay deeper. Here is his own account of it:<sup>1</sup>

"After much thinking I have arrived at a definition of *swadeshi* that perhaps best illustrates my meaning: *Swadeshi is that spirit within us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings, to the exclusion of the more remote.*

"Thus (1) in the matter of religion I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. . . . If I find my religion defective, I should serve by purging it of its defects. (2) In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions, and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. (3) In the field of economics I should use only those things that are produced by my immediate neighbours, and serve those industries by making them efficient."

This is one of the boldest and simplest statements ever penned of a conservative rule of life. As C. F. Andrews pointed out, it seems to exclude the possibility of "a single World Religion and a single World State." It points rather to "separate units working out their individual destiny in cordial, harmonized, friendly relations." But "there will always be impassable barriers between them, which appear to him divinely ordained." Gandhi believed himself to be an orthodox Hindu, but he studied the sacred writings of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, and he drew some of his inspiration from the Sermon on the Mount. He stressed the common elements which he found in all these religions, and tended, I think, to slur over their startling differences. Until his last years he did not realize what a potent cause of hate a religion can be. His statement raises a question even more difficult than that which Andrews suggests. If each of us is bound to his ancestral religion, did Gandhi deny the possibility of reaching objective truth, valid in every latitude? Or is there only Hindu truth,

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches and Writings*, p. 273.

Christian truth and Islamic truth ? One has to bear in mind that Hinduism has never claimed to be a universal religion, and has never proselytized. It is a way of life and a system of ritual observances, practised in the framework of caste by the inhabitants of Hindustan. I do not know how Gandhi would have answered this question. But it is important to point out that he did seem to recognize an authority superior even to Hindu tradition—his own social conscience, the Inner Voice which often spoke to him in tones that demanded obedience. Thus he rejected absolutely the whole doctrine and practice of untouchability. To be sure, after he had condemned it on grounds of humanity, he went on to argue that it is a corruption of the authentic gospel of Hinduism. But clearly, from his own account, it was his own instinctive humanity that spoke first, while he was still a boy; the unconvincing appeal to history was an afterthought.

Again, it was reflection, his experience of life and, in some degree, the influence of Tolstoy, that brought him to his fundamental doctrine of *ahimsa*. He then went to the Hindu scriptures and to the folk poetry of Gujerat and rediscovered it there. If I may give my own view briefly and bluntly on this much-disputed question, I think Gandhi put his claim much too high. Certainly the Buddhists and Jains preached and practised *ahimsa*, and the Jain influence is still a vital force in his native Gujerat. The first five of Gandhi's vows were the code of the Jain monks during two thousand years. It may well be that tendencies akin to *ahimsa* are diffused in the thinking of the sects based on the cult of Vishnu, in which Gandhi was brought up. But his reading of this doctrine into the *Bhagavad Gita* distorted its plain meaning, as we have seen already. How is it possible to maintain that Hindu orthodoxy taught the doctrine of *ahimsa*, when, in fact, in the pyramid of its castes, it placed in the second of the four ranks the warrior castes, whose function is to fight and rule ? Gandhi trusted, in the last resort, in his own private judgment.<sup>1</sup> A Hindu can modify and select in this way, as a Catholic or a Muslim cannot, because his religion was never an organized church, with a recognized hierarchy and a formulated creed.

Gandhi had a genius for sublimating even those elements of Hindu religion which make the least appeal to men of other creeds. Take, for

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, for his later views on caste.

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example, his attitude to the sanctity of the cow. He recognizes frankly that there is much carelessness, and even cruelty, in the treatment of cows by Hindus. Yet he maintains that "cow-protection" is the central fact of Hinduism, and one of the "most wonderful phenomena of human evolution." The cow is for him the symbol of the entire "sub-human world." "By learning to revere an animal, man is taken beyond his species and is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives." Gandhi could be at once a bold reformer and the most reverent of conservatives. *Swadeshi* meant for him the tranquil acceptance of the condition in which God has placed us—our nationality, our ancestral religion, our caste, our hereditary occupation, our station and its duties. "Our religious duty," he wrote, "appears to me to include the environment wherein we were placed at birth by God. It connotes our seeking to live in harmony with those birth conditions and not rebelling against them, or seeking to overpass their limitations."

Let us return now to the *ashram* from which these theoretic discussions started. The next vow was of "fearlessness." Indians, Gandhi declared, were in the grip of a paralysing fear. They feared their neighbours, their caste, their social superiors and their officials. They talked openly only within the walls of their homes. And so he called for both civic and physical courage.

Of the first importance was the vow to make an end of untouchability. So long, he declared, as Indians retain this institution, every affliction under which they labour is a proper punishment for the crime they are committing.

Then—one can hardly call it a vow—came the rule to learn as many Indian vernaculars as possible. Gandhi was convinced that the use of English as the medium of all higher education was a deadly mistake, which broke the continuity of a student's development by rubbing off from his memory all the years of his infancy.

The vow of *khaddar* was to spin with one's own hands and to wear nothing but homespun and home-woven cloth (*khadi* or *khaddar*). So the students were to learn the dignity of manual labour. Behind this rule lay an aspect of Gandhi's social outlook which I am keeping for consideration in a later chapter<sup>1</sup>—the horror with which the industrial

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XVII.

system of the West inspired him, and his belief that the solution of India's problem of poverty lay in the revival of spinning by hand.

Finally, Gandhi enjoined on his novices the study of politics, and especially of the political institutions of their own country, in a religious spirit. "Politics divorced from religion has absolutely no meaning."

It may help us to grasp Gandhiji's ideas more clearly if we try to discover where the clash begins between his view of life and that of the contemporary West. What, first, are we to make of his rigid asceticism in matters of diet and sex? These he stresses, but one notices also the absence of any recognition of men's æsthetic needs; the arts he rarely, if ever, mentions, though he was sensitive to the beauty of nature. Part of the explanation is that he is oppressed by the inhuman poverty of the Indian masses. The arts can mean nothing to men who are starving every day for lack of bread. The poet, as Gandhi said in his controversy with Tagore, may paint his picture of the birds singing their hymns as they soar into the sky. "Those birds had their day's food . . . but I have had the pain of watching birds who, for want of strength, could not be coaxed even into a flutter of their wings." But that is not the whole explanation. The first key to the difference is, I think, that Gandhi retains what many in the West have lost, a living faith in personal immortality, which for him took the form of a belief in reincarnation. The importance of my brief spell of life in my present body shrinks to insignificance if I believe that it is but one incident in a long cycle of births. Europeans may work and struggle for the immortal society of which we are members. But our attitude is instinctively positive. To choose what is worthy, and disdain what is mean—this we must do. But we see no virtue in abstinence as an ideal.

Again, a psychologist would point to the haunting sense of guilt to which Gandhi constantly confesses—not merely personal guilt for his own supposed shortcomings, but vicarious guilt for the sins and defects of others. Time after time he punishes himself or does penance, usually by fasting, for the wrongdoing of his fellow-men. From the obsession, conscious or unconscious, with the idea of guilt, modern psychology is trying to wean us. Linked with this is an attitude towards suffering which is strange to our generation. The practice of

non-violence, Gandhi warns his disciples, involves a readiness to suffer all things. "Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone. . . . The purer the suffering, the greater is the progress."

Before we turn away from what is strange to us, let us realize fully what asceticism did for this unusual man. He suppressed and sublimated sex in himself, as other saints have done before him, until it gave him a magnetism that won the millions of his fellow-countrymen. He converted what he would have called his "lusts" into a universal love that shone from him and embraced a nation. By his austerities and his self-inflicted suffering he trained his will to a self-control and a discipline that, in the end, became effortless. The strangest thing about him was that, with all his rejection of the joys of life, this man was habitually happy and even gay. Between his fasts he knew how to laugh and joke like a boy. I have seen him anxious and perplexed in times of difficulty. But the face that lives in my memory was as serene and unclouded as it was kindly. From this ascetic the moderns of the West have a long lesson to learn of forgotten wisdom.

Gandhi's social aim was never revolution, but always a return to the ancestral pattern. Deeply interesting were his reasons for rejecting Socialism. Its ethical ideal is not far from his own. Even when he accepted caste (as he did till his later years) he insisted, against the usage of countless centuries, on wiping out the distinction between "higher" and "lower" castes; a Brahmin stood no higher in his estimation than a barber or a sweeper. The effect of his teaching, if generally followed, would have been to realize not merely social, but economic, equality. But the change, he insisted, must be voluntary; it must come about by conversion. His principle of *ahimsa* forbade him to use coercion, even in the form of a legislative enactment, backed by all the forms of law and the will of the majority. Thus he would not "dispossess" an idle, functionless land-owner; he would appeal to his social conscience. To a western mind, this seems a partial application of the principle of *ahimsa*. Behind this land-owner, or for that matter behind the ruthless mill-owner, stand the police, the Law Courts, the criminal code and the whole apparatus of coercion that is the State. Without the police and their rifles and *lathis* (staves),



could such a landlord levy his rents or enjoy his unearned wealth? If legalized force may be used to maintain a *status quo* favourable to the privileged classes, why may it not be used to end their oppressions? The stubborn Victorian Liberals who opposed the Factory Acts were really appealing to the same principle, though they called it not *ahimsa* but the freedom of the individual. We must ask such questions, and many others no less searching, before our western experience of life will allow us to embrace Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence as an absolute rule for our conduct.

When all this is said, our debt to this Hindu prophet is not diminished. In a world where violence threatens ruin and the extinction of all moral values, our salvation can come only from a right understanding of this ideal of *ahimsa*. With force in an imperfect world erring men may not be able to dispense. But it is the worse way, though the better way may not always be open to us. To persuade when we can, to restrain when we cannot, but even then to continue our use of education and a curative discipline—that is the rule for a society which understands democracy aright, whether it is dealing with its criminals, its militarists or its exploiters.

We have next to come to terms with Gandhi's far-reaching principle of *swadeshi*. If I understand it aright, it stresses above all else my duty to my "immediate neighbours." I find myself replying with the question that runs through the whole history of civilization: "But who are my neighbours?" Does that word "immediate" limit them to my tribe, my village, my caste or my nation? They are those, presumably, with whom I have dealings—the Welsh miners from whom I get my electric current, the coolies in Assam who grew my tea, the lascars who carried it in ships, the Africans who raised the ground-nuts that fill my larder. The steamship and the aeroplane have made of all mankind my neighbours.

I can hear Gandhi's answer: "Why must you have these things? Your ancestors did without them." He might agree—though I doubt it—if I were to plead for the laying of pipes to carry water. There is no more beautiful sight in India than the graceful poise of the women who carry water in earthen jars upon their heads from the well to their homes—but this is sometimes a labour of many hours. We can "do without" pipes and taps and drains; but why should we, at the

cost of inflicting needless toil on our fellows ? The western interest in gadgets and machines may be carried to excessive, and even to laughable, lengths. But is the readiness of a man to "do without" really a proof of his spirituality ? Too often it springs from the inertia caused by malnutrition, malaria and the heat of summer.

There is, none the less, much to be said for Gandhi's ideas about our "immediate neighbours." Is it really possible to have, with countless anonymous men at the ends of the earth, a relationship that squares with morality ? How can I make sure that I am not exploiting indirectly the worker in the plantations of Assam or Tanganyika ? This is not a new problem. Rousseau's ideal of democracy was the Swiss Canton and the City Republic where all the citizens met in a general assembly, and Godwin carried on his argument. Like Gandhi, Tolstoy believed in the village as the only social unit within which men can practise morality. One must know one's neighbours and talk to them face to face; then only is it possible to honour the commandment to "love thy neighbour as thyself." Our modern answer is not yet convincing. We are trying to create a vast world-wide mechanism, yesterday the League of Nations, today the United Nations, with its international conventions regulating the conditions of the worker. It works, as yet, very ill. It is an afterthought, a tardy concession to our social conscience. Always the exploiter goes first, and humanity on lame feet limps in his wake. The fatality of history drives the Westerner forward in search of a solution so complicated that it may prove to be beyond human capacity to make it work. Gandhi tried to go back, but his solution, even in India, cannot succeed against the driving power of the triumphant machine. In the end, a compromise may be found in decentralization. Assuredly the overgrown industrial town is a monstrosity. Let the village recover its self-government; let us scatter the new industries in rural centres. But the thing can be done only with the help of electric power, which links these units in an intimate network of neighbourly cooperation.

The negative side of Gandhi's doctrine of *swadeshi* was rarely obtrusive in his own writings. But as some of his disciples interpreted it, it could have disturbing implications. Romain Rolland drew attention<sup>1</sup> to a book entitled *A Gospel of Swadeshi*, by D. B. Kalelkar, a

<sup>1</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 112.

teacher in the Sabarmati *ashram*, for which Gandhi wrote a preface of approval. It preached the narrowest and most reactionary nationalism, and dignified it with the sanction of religion. God, it argued, "has placed each human being in the environment best suited for the fulfilment of his task. We cannot choose our culture any more than our birth, family or country. We must accept that which God has given us. . . . To renounce tradition would be sinful." It follows that we should not concern ourselves with the affairs of other countries, or try to reform the world. It is as criminal for India to export her products as to import those of others. It is even wrong to export ideas. Moreover, "we should avoid being intimate with those whose social customs are different from ours." In later years Gandhi stated that he no longer agreed with everything in this book. In fact, it contradicts his own practice, for, in spite of his veneration for tradition, he never concealed his debt to some European thinkers, and actually translated works of Plato and Ruskin. It was an exponent of this exclusive, militant Hindu nationalism who eventually murdered him. The true lesson of Indian history has been drawn by Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India*. The creative days of Indian culture, alike in thought and in art, belong to the centuries when Indians boldly adventured abroad and colonized Indo-China and Indonesia, carrying their civilization with them. When the Brahminical reaction closed their doors and forbade them, on pain of losing caste, to cross "the dark waters," Indian culture was frozen and sterilized. Progress springs from the interaction and intermarriage of cultural traditions. If in Gandhi's generation many Indians turned their backs on western culture with an affectation of contempt, this was an inevitable reaction against ideas and institutions that came to them inseparably linked with the humiliations of their subject status.

These, then, were the vows on which the teaching at the Sabarmati *ashram* was based. One may reject their theological foundation, as I do, but this way of life remains, none the less, a noble experiment that commands our admiration and respect. In this community, where work was prayer and prayer was love, Gandhiji's personality was incarnated. This man, as Edward Thompson truly said of him, was the greatest Indian since the days of the Buddha. And was he not, since Francis of Assisi, the greatest of the saints?

## CHAPTER X

### THE WORKING MASSES

SOON AFTER his return to India, Gandhiji found a congenial task in service to the oppressed. The summons came to him at the session of Congress in Lucknow, which adopted, rather casually, a resolution of sympathy with the peasants on the indigo plantations of Champaran, a remote district of Bihar, at the foot of the Himalayas. A simple villager from this district, who attended the Congress, attached himself to Gandhi and implored him to visit it and study the oppression under which its peasantry suffered. After following Gandhi on his journeys all over India, his importunity was rewarded, and in 1917 he conducted him to Champaran for an inquiry that marked a turning point in the Mahatma's career.

The growing of indigo in Champaran was organized by white planters early in the nineteenth century, and ranked among the most profitable enterprises of the British in India. The dye was extracted from the indigo plants in their factories by a very simple process. This was one of the few cases in which Englishmen settled on the land and drew their wealth from the labour of the peasants. The result was a blend of all that was worst in British industrialism with the Indian feudal tradition. Served by numerous retainers, the planters exacted from their tenants all the "fines" and "servitudes" sanctioned by custom in the most backward Indian states. They levied a tax on marriage, a tax on every hearth and on every oil mill. If the Sahib needed an elephant, or wished to pay a visit to the hills, the tenants must bear the cost and pay a special tax. The system recalls the exactions of French feudalism, which Voltaire exposed on the eve of the Revolution. The chief grievance of the tenants was sanctioned by a clause of the provincial Land Act. They were compelled to grow indigo on a fixed proportion of the land they rented, never less than 3/20 of its

area. The growing of this crop, at the prices the planters chose to pay, was unprofitable. When labour was hired, the wages were on a starvation level—10 pice ( $2\frac{1}{2}$ d.) for a man, 6 pice ( $1\frac{1}{2}$ d.) for a woman and 3 pice ( $\frac{3}{4}$ d.) for a child. These were their earnings for an entire day's work in the fields from dawn to sunset; the children were put to work as soon as they could handle a hoe.

So life had run on in Champaran during three generations, in spite of several futile risings. The planters constituted white society, and it was useless to complain of their doings. But now a new phase of this exploitation had set in. Aniline dyes were driving the natural indigo from the market, and the planters cast about for ways of recouping their losses at the expense of the peasants. Their first device was to free their tenants, in return for an enhanced rent, from the obligation to grow indigo. The planters adopted this expedient when they held their estates on a permanent lease. In other cases, where they held the land only on a short lease, they exacted payment of a lump sum in cash down. They were then graciously pleased to exempt the tenant from the obligation of cultivating a plant which was now a drug in the world market. In this way they raised as much as Rs.12 lakhs (£90,000) from their tenants. These alchemists had discovered how to turn not lead, but losses, into gold.

Gandhiji's arrival roused new hopes in the peasants, and they thronged him to tell their story. Friends came to help him in his inquiry, among them Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Professor Kripalani and Mahadev Desai, later Gandhi's secretary, who put his quick intelligence and his tireless capacity for work at the Mahatma's service for the rest of his life. The Commissioner advised him to leave the district forthwith. Soon he received a formal notice, under the notorious Section 144 of the Penal Code, to leave Champaran. To this Gandhi replied with a written statement that he did not propose to comply until he had finished his inquiry. Next day he was put on his trial for disobeying the order. He read a statement which was at once a defiance and a plea of guilty. Since he could not believe that his coming could disturb the public peace, his sense of duty bade him remain.

This was not the usual way in which Indian politicians faced the Government's charges. Gandhi's respectful defiance took the Magistrate by surprise, and he postponed judgment. Before he could deliver



region, for most of the peasants own their own land. But in 1918 there had been, in the district of Khaira, a widespread failure of the crops, and a threat of conditions near to famine. The peasants contended that the harvest was less than 25 per cent of normal. In that case, according to the rules, the collection of the Land Tax should have been suspended. But the Government maintained that the crops were above this level. Debates in the Bombay Legislative Council produced no effect. This was a situation that called for *satyagraha*, but the idea was strange to the peasants. Gandhi called, therefore, for volunteers who would instruct and organize them. Among these new helpers was Vallabhbhai Patel, who abandoned a lucrative practice at the Bar and soon became a leading figure in all the activities of Congress. What they sought and got was the signature, by large numbers of peasants, of a pledge in which they first stated their case and then undertook that they would not pay the tax, even if resistance involved the forfeiture of their lands.

The Government, after some delay, resorted to coercion. It seized and sold the cattle of the peasants. Its next step was to attack their standing crops. This unnerved them, for their food supply was threatened. A well-staged act of non-violent resistance helped to restore their courage. Under Gandhi's advice a group of seven or eight volunteers lifted the onion crop from a field that had been attached. For this "theft" they were tried and sentenced. A procession of their grateful and admiring neighbours escorted them to prison, and the spirits of the people rose.

Meanwhile, the Government had decided to compromise, though it did it silently and in a graceless way. It would not press the poorer peasants to pay, and would enforce the tax only against the more prosperous farmers. Gandhi advised the acceptance of this solution, and so in a rather unimpressive way the campaign came to an end. Many of his followers felt that the methods of *satyagraha* had won a triumph, but Gandhi himself was not enthusiastic. We shall see, when we come to the events of 1930, with what courage, unanimity and readiness for sacrifice these same Gujarati peasants then carried out a campaign of tax-resistance.

In yet another field India's masses called to Gandhi for help. He gave it to the mill-hands of Ahmedabad, in a form even more con-

structive and enduring than his work for the peasants. It was one of his early disciples and friends, Anasuyaben Sarabhai, who first began in 1916 to organize these textile workers. A wealthy woman, sister to a leading mill-owner of the town, she has devoted all her fortune and all her energies to this work. In 1918, during a dispute between the weavers and the mill-owners, she sought Gandhi's help as arbitrator. After a careful study of all the facts, he proposed an all-round increase of 35 per cent in wages. The men had asked for much more. The employers, who were not prepared to grant more than 20 per cent, then declared a lock-out (22 February, 1918). Gandhi now called the idle workers together under a tree and persuaded them to take a pledge to keep the peace, and not to return to work till their demands were granted. But strike pay there was none. After a fortnight's endurance, some of the men began to murmur. It was all very well for Gandhi to exact a pledge, but how were they to feed their children? His reaction was characteristic. He determined that if the men had to suffer, so would he. So he imposed on himself a fast—in effect, a fast to death; he would take no food until the dispute ended with the granting of his demands. The men begged him to abandon his fast, but he would not. Many appeals reached the mill-owners from all over India to save Gandhi's life by yielding, and Mrs. Sarabhai, the leading mill-owner's wife, used her great influence. A formula was found that enabled the employers to return to the original plan of arbitration. On the fourth day Gandhi ended his fast, and the workers got their 35 per cent increase in wages.

This unique episode was the most dramatic event in the life-history of the Textile Labour Association. There have been other serious disputes since 1918, but they were settled with Gandhi's aid as arbitrator. It has conducted many strikes, but they have been brief and trivial affairs confined to a single mill. More far-reaching was the right the Union's officers enjoyed of investigating complaints from individual members and arranging a settlement. It holds aloof from the All-India Trade Union Congress, and is violently attacked by Communists because its articles of association talk about truth and *ahimsa* instead of declaring the class-war.

Its teeming offices, as I saw them in 1930, were the centre of the workers' social life, and it carried on a big range of activities which



in Europe fall to the municipality or the State. It taught its members, amused them and organized them as a voting force. It tried, by exhibitions and pictures, to give them simple lessons about health and the rearing of children. It published a weekly paper and ran a cinema, a reading room, a circulating library, five gymnasiums and a choir. It had a hospital, two dispensaries and no less than twenty-three schools. To me, the most impressive of its institutions was one of its many night schools for illiterate adults. This was held in a ramshackle house in one of the appalling slums of this overcrowded and insanitary city. The teacher, who gave his time without payment, had to work by candlelight. But manifestly his pupils were learning. A happier sight was an open-air school for untouchable children. The influence that inspired these schools and hospitals was Gandhi's. Where there is a slum, there you will find the members of his *ashram*.

We come now, in this year 1918, to one of the most puzzling incidents in Gandhi's career, his activity as a recruiting-sergeant for the British Empire. An invitation reached him from the Viceroy to attend a War Conference in New Delhi. In spite of his still unshaken loyalty, he had some grounds for hesitation. He had heard from C. F. Andrews something about secret treaties which revealed the imperial ambitions behind this "war to end war." Of European power politics he knew little, but he felt a vague disquiet. Lord Chelmsford won him over with an appeal to his chivalry. "If you believe that India has, on the whole, benefited by the British connexion, would you not admit that it is the duty of every Indian citizen to help the Empire in the hour of its need?"

So Gandhi attended the conference and supported a resolution in favour of recruiting. He uttered only one sentence, but he spoke it in Hindustani—the first occasion on which an Indian language had been used at such a gathering. He now had to act on the resolution he had publicly supported, and he chose to do his recruiting in Khaira, where his influence stood high. He soon received a rude shock. The peasants were far from feeling good will towards the Empire. In his campaign against the land revenue the people offered him their carts free of charge, and when he asked for one volunteer he got two. Now he could not even hire a cart. He had to trudge on foot from one inhospitable village to another, carrying his food in his satchel. By per-



## CHAPTER XI

### THE LOYALIST TURNS REBEL

**W**E ARE NOW at the turning point in Gandhi's career. In the two years that followed the First World War, Gandhi evolved from the loyalist who went recruiting for the British Empire, into the uncompromising rebel who played a decisive part in winning India's independence. To understand this development we must relive a forgotten chapter of history. The Home Government was impressed by India's loyalty during the long struggle, and it had taken the decision which did, in fact, govern British policy, though with many vacillations and delays, through the next quarter of a century. Its aim was now, according to the declaration of 1917, "the granting of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire." But it was pre-occupied with matters that seemed to it more urgent—the peace settlement, the Irish crisis, the Russian revolution, the Turkish question. Impatient over the delay, Indians were ripe for revolt before the gift from Downing Street could reach them.

Indians had suffered many things under the wartime administration, and peace brought no alleviation. Prices had risen steeply while wages lagged behind them, and there had been no attempt to check profiteering or to ration necessities. The influenza epidemic of 1918, with its total of thirteen million deaths, revealed the depressed physical condition of the people. Though recruiting for the army had been in theory voluntary, in fact severe means of pressure had been used. The same thing was true of the immense sums subscribed to the war loans. The resentment was especially strong in the Punjab. There, and elsewhere, another complication influenced the mood of the Muslims—their indignation over the policy of the victors towards their co-religionists in Turkey. Finally, we have to consider the state

of mind of the British in India. Four years of war had awakened the militarist instincts that normally lie latent in us. In the Punjab, as in Ireland, they forgot their customary scruples. Civilians who had served in the army returned to their desks and their clubs in no mood to meet India's new claims.

The challenge that roused Gandhi on his sick-bed was the publication in the summer of 1918 of the report of the Rowlatt Committee on the repression of seditious movements. Mr. Justice Rowlatt and his colleagues proposed to adopt as permanent institutions some of the exceptional measures of the wartime Defence of India Act, which would soon expire. Political cases were to be tried without a jury, and power was conferred on the Government to intern suspects indefinitely without a trial. The effect on Indian opinion was catastrophic. It expected self-government, but first came coercion.

Gandhiji at once prepared for a campaign of *satyagraha*. Though still so weak that he had not the strength to address a public meeting, he risked a journey to Southern India. At Madras (to use his own words), in the moment between sleeping and waking, he heard an inner voice which told him what to do. His inspiration was to stage a nation-wide *hartal* by way of protest. This method, familiar all over the East, is something between a day of mourning and a one-day strike; shops and factories close, and all work ceases. Characteristically, Gandhi defined it as a day of "humiliation and prayer." He had only to issue a brief appeal and the idea was everywhere adopted; Sunday, 30 March, 1919, the date first fixed, was afterwards changed to 6 April.

At Delhi, which observed the earlier day, the demonstration was peculiarly impressive, because it took the form of a celebration of Hindu-Muslim fraternity. A famous Hindu religious thinker, Swami Shradhdhanand, was actually invited to address a vast meeting in the Great Mosque. A procession was fired on by the police and eight persons were killed.

Over the vast extent of the Peninsula the *hartal* was observed peacefully, save only in the Punjab. In Bombay it was a great success, with Gandhi as its central figure. He spoke in one of the mosques, and so also did Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the poetess—surely for a Hindu woman a unique honour. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and his translation

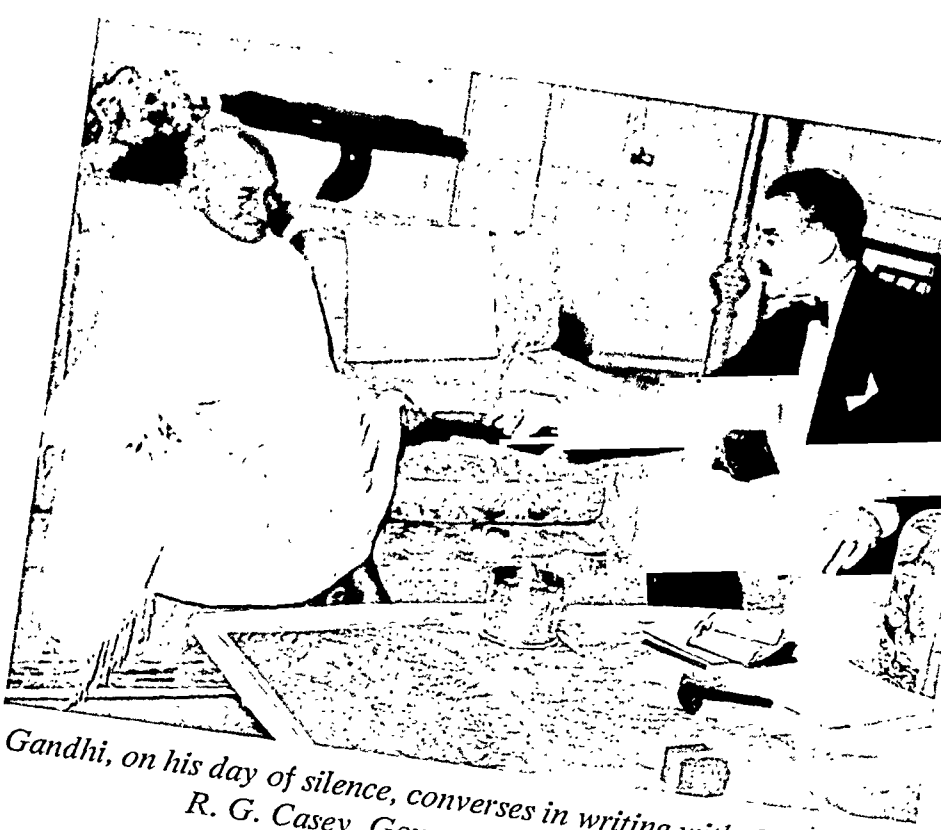
of Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, both of them prohibited books, were sold openly in the streets.

In the Punjab, meanwhile, the *hartal* had led to serious disorders, and the police had fired on the people both in Amritsar and Lahore. These disorders, it should be explained, began in March, before the *hartal*, and reflected the anger of the people caused by long-standing grievances. Absurd rumours in the bazaars about the Rowlatt Act revealed the tension among the illiterate masses. Riots were taking the unusual form of attacks on isolated Europeans. An appeal reached Gandhi from the local Congress leaders, and on 7 April he set out for Amritsar, hoping by his presence in this distracted province to restore peace. Unhappily, he was prevented. On the way he was stopped by the police, and escorted back to Bombay.

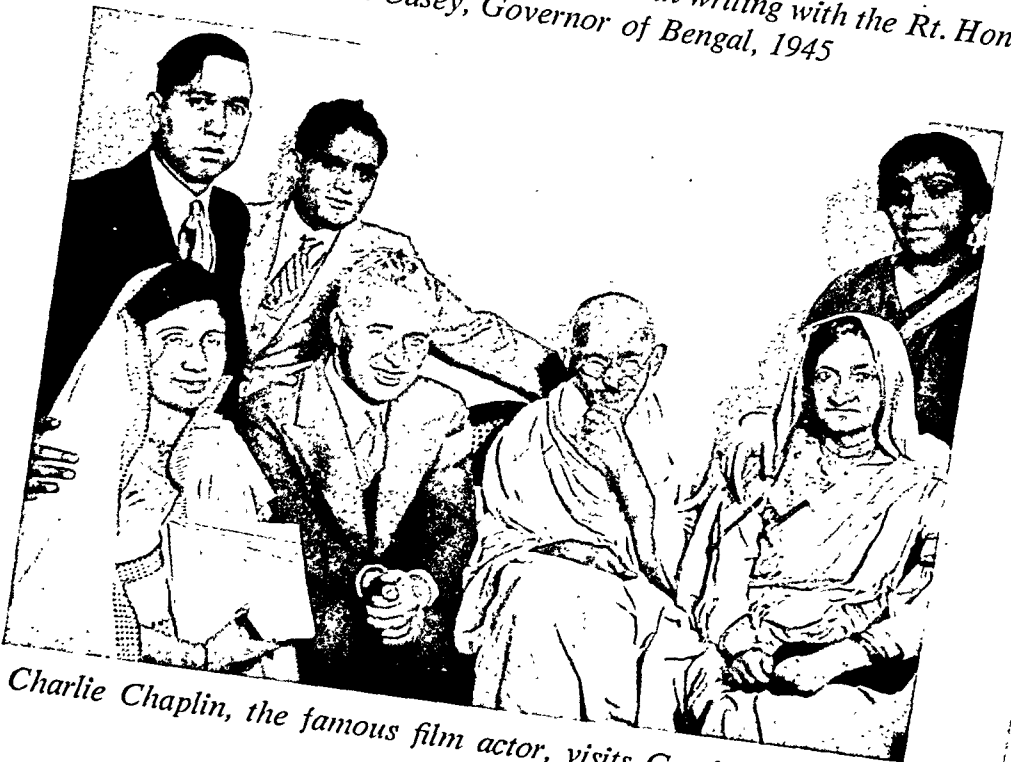
The news of his temporary arrest spread instantly to Ahmedabad, Bombay and the whole region of Gujerat. The masses, whose beloved hero he was, gave way in their excitement to their natural anger and forgot all he had taught them about non-violence. In Ahmedabad and elsewhere there were riots which led to several murders. In Bombay, when Gandhi appeared, the crowds went mad with joy and formed a triumphal procession, which broke through the police cordon. Gandhi was helpless and had to witness a charge by the mounted police, armed with lances. He now set himself to restore peace, addressing great crowds, to whom he tried to explain the principles of non-violence. He admitted that he had made a "Himalayan blunder." At Ahmedabad he imposed on himself a penitential fast for three days and pleaded with the people to fast for one day. Great though his faith was, a sense of his failure overcame him, and on 18 April he suspended the campaign. But at once this indomitable man began to prepare for the continuation of the struggle. He now realized that the masses would never observe non-violence, unless they were disciplined and led by an élite which thoroughly understood his doctrines. Lenin, when he planned a bloody revolution, relied on a picked corps of "professional revolutionaries," schooled for years in advance. Gandhi's bloodless revolution by "soul-force" must also have its select "band of well-trying, pure-hearted volunteers." Promptly, in Bombay, he called for volunteers, whom he proceeded to instruct. The results were disappointing. Few responded, and as



*Gandhi and cotton workers, Darwen (Lancs), 1931*



*Gandhi, on his day of silence, converses in writing with the Rt. Hon.  
R. G. Casey, Governor of Bengal, 1945*



*Charlie Chaplin, the famous film actor, visits Gandhi in London*

the training went on their numbers dwindled. "Thus I realized that the progress of the training in civil disobedience was not going to be as rapid as I had at first expected."

We must now return to the disturbed Punjab, where the stage was set for tragedy. At Amritsar, on 10 April, the two Congress leaders, Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal, who were trying to restrain the masses from violence, were deported. A procession which went to demand their release was fired on by the police. Carrying its dead with it, it then went rioting. It attacked two banks and the railway-station, murdered five Europeans and beat up another, Miss Sherwood, savagely. Meetings were then forbidden, though few knew of this order.

On the thirteenth a peaceful meeting was held in the enclosed garden of Jallianwala Bagh, which had only one narrow exit. Into the trapped and tightly packed crowd of unarmed men, General Dyer ordered his troops to fire, which they did for ten minutes till their ammunition was exhausted. The killed, according to the official figures, numbered 397 persons. The wounded, at least 1,200 persons, were left to lie where they fell, unattended. After this massacre, martial law was proclaimed throughout the Punjab, for there had been lesser disorders elsewhere. Aircraft were used, both to drop bombs and to fire on groups of peasants. Humiliating punishments were inflicted on all Indians indiscriminately, such as crawling on all-fours through the street where Miss Sherwood was attacked. Public floggings of naked men were frequent for trivial offences. Indian civilians were required to salute British officers, and to dismount on meeting them, if they were riding or driving. This campaign of reprisal and repression continued for eight weeks. The nerves of the British forces were on edge, because they were expecting an attack from Afghanistan. It came, indeed, but was easily repelled.

For a quarter of a century these events dug a chasm of racial estrangement between Indians and Europeans. What especially impressed Indians, when the news of the massacre belatedly reached England, was the feeble and divided reaction it caused there. It was not till September that an official inquiry was held under Lord Hunter. Though it established a damning array of facts, its conclusions were weak, and it criticized General Dyer's action only in the



mildest of words.<sup>1</sup> He was recalled from his command and lost his pension, but neither he nor any other officer was otherwise punished. When Parliament debated his case, though the Government censured his actions, a minority in the Commons and a great majority in the Lords approved it. He was then presented by his many admirers with a sword of honour and a purse of £20,000.

Gandhi, meanwhile, played his part in an unofficial Congress inquiry into the operation of martial law. During the last days of 1919, Congress met in the storm-laden atmosphere of Amritsar. Its chief business was to express an opinion on the Government of India Act (1919), which Parliament had just passed. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were a delicately balanced compromise, a halfway house toward self-government. The All-India Assembly at New Delhi, with an elected majority and a nominated minority, was entrusted, in appearance, with legislative powers. But the reality of autocracy remained intact, for the Viceroy still governed with a nominated Executive Council, and he possessed the right to pass any legislation at will, including the levying of taxes, by a process of "certification." In the provinces the curious system of "dyarchy" was adopted. The vital subjects, including finance and law and order, were reserved to the Governor and his civil servants; the less crucial subjects, such as education and health, were transferred to Indian Ministers responsible to Councils elected on a propertied franchise. A royal proclamation, couched in generous language, announced an amnesty for many political prisoners. But the mood of the Congress, voiced most emphatically by C. R. Das, the able Bengali leader, was hostile to the reforms, which it declared to be "inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing," while it affirmed its belief that India was "fit for full responsible government."

For us, the interesting fact is that Gandhi was among the minority willing to work the reforms in a spirit of "responsive cooperation." Even now, in the last days of 1919, he was still a loyalist, still a disciple of his master Gokhale. There was, however, no open clash of divided opinions, for an amendment of his to the formula of

<sup>1</sup> He was held to have "committed a grave error of judgment which exceeded the reasonable requirements of the case"; his conduct, however, was "based upon an honest but mistaken conception of duty."

## THE LOYALIST TURNS REBEL

rejection was skilfully emasculated and added to the resolution, which was then carried unanimously. In two characteristic ways the Mahatma's personality was impressed on this Congress. He shamed it into condemning the excesses of Indians in the Punjab, and he induced it to smile on his growing enthusiasm for hand spinning. What was it that made him a few months later an uncompromising advocate of non-cooperation?

To answer this question we must divert our attention from Hindu India to the Muslims. They were uneasy when they found themselves at war in 1914 with Muslim Turkey. Two of their leaders, the Ali brothers, were promptly interned for their seditious articles. Educated as theologians, they had taken to journalism and won a big popular following. They were vital, genial and militant personalities, and Mohamed Ali, as I recall him, had a gift for witty speech. Under the amnesty they were now released. At once they put fire into the pro-Turkish agitation, which blazed up when Indian Muslims grasped the intentions of the victors. The Turkish Empire was to be dismembered and was to lose not only the Arab provinces, but the whole of Thrace and the richest area of Asia Minor round Smyrna. This was a breach of Lloyd George's famous pledge: "Nor are we fighting to deprive Turkey of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace, which are predominantly Turkish in race." But this was not all. These terms meant that the Sultan of Turkey would cease to be the Caliph of the Islamic world. The British candidate for the Caliphate was Sheikh Hussein, the Sherif of Mecca, Lawrence of Arabia's protégé. Judged by Islamic tradition, this was impossible. The puppet of a Christian Power could not fill this position. The Caliph was the temporal, as well as the spiritual, head of the Islamic world. He wielded the sword of Allah on earth. His first duty was to protect the roads over which pilgrims must travel every year to Mecca. For this purpose, he must be a powerful and independent prince, holding sway over Arabia and the Holy Places. Inspired by this tradition, the Muslim masses were now rallying in their millions to the Caliphate (or, as Indians spelt it, the Khilafat) Movement. Here was a new threat to British rule. The Hindus were now fraternizing with the Muslims.

This new fraternity was mainly Gandhi's creation. In South Africa

he had encouraged Hindu-Muslim unity. After his return to India he visited the Muslim University at Aligarh; he spoke at a meeting of the Muslim League; he preached in a mosque; he was chosen to preside at a Caliphate conference in October, 1919, at Delhi. Finally, on 19 January, 1920, he joined a deputation of Muslim leaders which laid the demands of the Caliphate Movement before the Viceroy.

What are we to think of this new departure in his political thinking? That he should favour Hindu-Muslim unity was natural. He believed in human brotherhood, and understood that the surest way to win *swaraj* from the British was to form a common front. But on its merits the case for the Caliphate could make no appeal to Hindus. The Muslims were disposed to offer a bargain. If Hindus would back them in their pro-Turkish agitation, they would respond by stopping the ritual slaughter of cows at their annual Bakr-id festival, a frequent cause of riots. This approach Gandhi had publicly rejected. "The way to save the cow is to die in the act of saving the Caliphate without mentioning the cow." He never liked bartering. "I contended," he wrote, "that if the Caliphate question had a just and legitimate basis, as I believe it had, and if the Government had really committed a gross injustice, the Hindus were bound to stand by the Mussalmans. . . . When a just claim is supported by scriptures it becomes irresistible." We must not expect Gandhiji to share the modern western attitude to a reactionary, theocratic claim which had a meaning in the Middle Ages. He was an opponent of modern civilization. For him, as for the Ali brothers, politics meant religion. But in this case other interests were involved which Gandhi overlooked. The Arabs had put forward their demand for the right of self-determination, But Gandhi dismissed accounts of Turkish misrule as mere propaganda. On a long view, as we shall see, the Caliphate Movement rested on a false foundation. But on a short view, it seemed to offer to Indian nationalism a unique tactical opportunity, for it is only on religious issues that the backward Muslim masses can be easily aroused. And roused they soon were against the British Government. The Caliphate Movement, as Gandhi himself put it, offered an opportunity, which would not recur for another hundred years, to prove that the Mussalman was the brother of the Hindu.

During the early months of 1920, while awaiting the results of a

deputation sent to London, the Caliphate leaders were considering what measures they would adopt in the event of its expected failure. The decision lay with a sub-committee of three—Gandhi, Shaukat Ali and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a scholar and theologian, who became in after years a pillar of Congress. There were three possible courses: (1) violence; (2) a mass migration of Muslims from infidel rule in India to the nearest country under Muslim law, which was Afghanistan; and (3) non-violent non-cooperation. Gandhi knew very well that Islam is a religion of the sword. "My brother and friend, Shaukat Ali, believes in methods of violence." But he was able to convince his Muslim colleagues that violence was "not open" to them; they had no arms. On the same grounds of common-sense the mad notion of a mass migration was rejected, though many fanatics did attempt it. The three were unanimous, therefore, in recommending what Gandhi called "the peaceful and infallible doctrine of non-cooperation." This method was, he believed, strong enough "to paralyse the mightiest government on earth."

The name was his, but the idea came mainly from two sources. One of them was Thoreau, who, as a protest against slavery under the American flag, refused to pay his taxes. The other was the Irish nationalist movement, Sinn Fein. Thoreau was a moralist, who was thinking chiefly of his personal duty, but the Irishmen were shrewd tacticians. Gandhi was both. His conscious mind always spoke and wrote in ethical terms. "Non-cooperation is a duty when the government, instead of protecting, robs you of your honour." But, instinctively, his sub-conscious mind made its tactical calculations. He rarely, in speech or writing, so much as hinted at what one may call the mechanics of non-cooperation. But Indians grasped at once what non-cooperation in its full extent would mean. If they ceased to recognize the foreign government on their soil, ceased to obey it, ignored its Law Courts, refused to pay its taxes and declined to serve it as soldiers and policemen, would it not collapse, helplessly and painlessly? This Gandhi never said, but what he did say must have set his audience thinking: "It is as amazing as it is humiliating that less than a hundred thousand white men should be able to rule three hundred and fifteen million Indians."

Had Gandhi proposed instantaneous resort to non-cooperation

in its full extent,<sup>1</sup> he would then have courted two replies: first, it is too difficult, it can't be done; secondly, if it could be done, it would spell anarchy. So he began by proposing easy and harmless steps, which hurt the interests only of the few. To begin with, every self-respecting Indian should give up the honours and titles he had received from the British Government. Already Rabindranath Tagore had given up his knighthood. On 1 August, 1920, Gandhi himself followed by returning his Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal and the decorations he had won in South Africa. Next, lawyers should cease to practise in the Courts. Motilal Nehru, almost as popular in his day as his son Jawaharlal is in ours, led the way. To be sure, tax resistance would not be painless, but that lay a long way ahead, as Gandhi was always careful to point out. First he won the masses and so created an atmosphere which even the interested few could not resist. I watched this process in action ten years later. Women worked on the feelings of their men. Clerks, and even porters, could in the mass influence a wealthy merchant. Castes could, on occasion, put pressure on a weak-kneed member. This can happen only when religion or nationality fuses men into a hot, emotional mass. Of the two, religion kindles in India the stronger flame.

There lay the significance of the Caliphate issue. Accordingly, Gandhi made sure of the Muslims before he asked for the support of Congress, with its immense Hindu majority. The Muslims were already on fire with religious passion. This incandescent mass would flow into any mould its leaders made ready for it. The only danger was that the more foolish of its leaders might guide it into a disastrous channel.

This actually happened on the Frontier and in Sind, where the idea of a mass migration looked feasible, because Afghanistan is not too far away. In their thousands the peasants sold their lands and flocks for a song. In August alone, a multitude of eighteen thousand men, women and children set out with their camels and bullock-carts to trek across the desert to the promised land, where the Koran is obeyed. All told, there is reason to believe that half a million Muslims took the road to Afghanistan. When the pilgrims reached the Afghan frontier, their own fellow-Muslims turned them back. Many fell by the way. The survivors crept back homeless, penniless and broken

men. This ghastly tragedy proved the need for sane leadership, but it also revealed the red-hot temper of the Muslim masses.

It was not Gandhiji who made this opportunity. The British Government did that. His part was to use it, with his sure instinct for the psychology of the masses. On 14 May, 1920, the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres were published. It handed over the Holy Places to the new King of the Hedjaz and deprived Turkey of the Arab Lands, and of Thrace, Smyrna and Armenia as well. On 30 June a great Muslim Conference at Allahabad, following another at Bombay, adopted Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation. Meanwhile, in May, the report of the Hunter Commission on the Amritsar massacre and martial law in the Punjab was published. Gandhi drew attention to its "laboured defence of every official act of inhumanity." What struck him most forcibly was the "freemasonry" that united India's British rulers with their countrymen at home. Most Indians called it by a simpler name; for them it was racial contempt. That stung them as nothing else could. The second motive force was working in the swift drive towards rebellion. To consider the new situation, a special session of Congress was called for the early days of September in Calcutta. Gandhi went to it with the Muslim masses behind him, pledged to non-cooperation. The Hindu masses he had won already by his services to the indentured labourers of Natal, the villagers who grew indigo in Bihar, the peasants of Gujerat and the mill-hands of Ahmedabad.

Without the support of these unseen millions he must have failed at Calcutta. With one exception, all the veteran leaders of Congress were against him. Only Motilal Nehru supported him. Against him were Lala Rajpat Rai, beloved in the Punjab, and the two Bengali leaders, C. R. Das and Bepin Chandra Pal. Fortunately for him, the able group of Moderates had already quitted Congress to form their little Liberal Party. Tilak, who had been lukewarm over the Caliphate and non-cooperation, died on 3 July, but his followers from the Mahratta country kept his influence alive in a conservative communal-minded group, critical of Gandhi's leadership. That is true also of a strong current of Bengali opinion, though its tendencies were radical.

The main difficulty arose over the application of non-cooperation

to the reformed Provincial Councils, for which elections were due in November. Hundreds of influential Congressmen were already standing as candidates, and had spent time and money on their campaigns. Apart from any considerations of private interest, the tactics recommended by Gandhi were questionable. If Congressmen stood down, only moderates and time-servers would be elected to the councils—which was, in fact, what happened. Either of two other possible courses looked more attractive. The first was to follow the Sinn Fein precedent; candidates would be elected but would refuse to take their seats. By this method, with good luck, the Councils would lack a quorum and could not function. The other proposal was favoured by C. R. Das—to enter the Councils and use them for purposes of protest and obstruction. It was on this political aspect of non-cooperation that the debates largely turned.

The resolution on non-cooperation was moved by Gandhi. In his own original draft it based this policy only on the two burning wrongs of the day, the Caliphate and the Punjab, but on the advice of Motilal Nehru it now led up to a demand for *swaraj* as its climax—"the only effectual means to vindicate national honour and to prevent a repetition of similar wrongs in future is the establishment of *swarajya*." In the Subjects Committee, the stronghold, so to speak, of the commissioned officers of Congress, this resolution was adopted only by a bare majority; in the full House, which reflects mass opinion, it was carried by 1,886 delegates against 884. The opposition moved a dilatory amendment, but did not venture on a direct negative. The idea had captured Congress; those who disliked it could only play for time.

Gandhi's resolution went on to specify, as follows, the detailed steps through which he proposed that non-cooperation should be realized:

- (1) Surrender of titles, honorary offices and nominated seats.
- (2) Refusal to attend official Durbars and ceremonies.
- (3) Gradual withdrawal of students and pupils from Government colleges and schools, and the establishment of national colleges and schools to replace them.
- (4) Gradual boycott of British Courts by lawyers and litigants; establishment of private arbitration courts to replace them.

- (5) Refusal of soldiers, clerks and labourers to offer themselves for service in Mesopotamia.
- (6) Withdrawal of candidates from the elections for the reformed Councils, and abstention of electors from the poll.
- (7) Boycott of foreign goods. "This Congress advises adoption of *swadeshi* in piece goods on a vast scale, and, inasmuch as the existing mills of India with indigenous capital and control do not manufacture sufficient yarn and sufficient cloth for the requirements of the nation, and are not likely to do so for a long time to come, this Congress advises immediate stimulation of further manufacture . . . by means of reviving hand spinning in every house and hand weaving on the part of the millions of weavers who have abandoned their ancient and honourable calling for want of encouragement."

The boycott of colleges and schools was not a new idea; it had been adopted on a considerable scale in Bengal. The boycott of Law Courts was borrowed from Sinn Fein. The qualification "gradual" in both cases was due to Motilal Nehru. Neither Gandhi nor the Ali brothers were as yet calling on Indians to desert from the Army or Police Force; that came later. What they opposed at this stage was recruiting for Mesopotamia (Iraq), one of the Arab lands which, in their view, belonged as of right to the Caliph. There was no mention in this resolution of tax-resistance. The paragraph which outlined the idea that now dominated Gandhi's thinking was the last, which prescribed the boycott of foreign goods, among which it was chiefly cloth that interested him. By a skilful use of the political crisis he had brought Congress to adopt his cult of the spinning wheel.

The first test for the policy of non-cooperation came at the elections for the reformed Councils in November. The Congressmen among the candidates obeyed with perfect loyalty the decision taken at Calcutta. With C. R. Das at their head, they all withdrew. The boycott of the elections was also impressive; in a few places the ballot boxes were literally empty. But the Government had a better reason for satisfaction; the Councils were manned by moderates and yes-men. The weakness of this negative policy of abstention soon became apparent.

The behaviour of the Government in face of what was clearly a



revolutionary challenge was deeply interesting. It may have been slow to realize that the Mahatma's genius had transformed Indian history by awakening the hitherto apathetic masses. On the other hand, it was sensitive to the effect the Caliphate movement must have in sapping the loyalty of Muslims. The indifference of Lloyd George in this matter reflected the sentiments of Gladstonian Liberalism rather than the traditions of the British ruling class. The result was that it adopted an attitude of extreme caution. It did, of course, condemn the non-cooperation movement, as "a visionary and chimerical scheme" which threatened the "ruin of all those who have any real stake in the country." But it instructed Provincial Governments "to take action against those persons only who . . . have . . . openly incited the public to violence . . . or have attempted to tamper with the loyalty of the Army or the Police." For the rest, it put its trust in "the sanity of the classes and masses alike." Thus did Gandhi for the first time in Indian history bring the "masses" on to the political stage.

The Calcutta meeting was a "special" session of Congress; its decision had still to be confirmed at the regular session, held at the end of December, 1920, in Nagpur. The attendance this time was unprecedented; there were no less than fourteen thousand delegates, of whom a thousand were Muslims. The two dissentient groups, the Bengalis and Mahrattas, made a last determined effort to reverse the decision in favour of non-cooperation. G. S. Khaparde, the ablest of Tilak's lieutenants, argued against it in a well-written memorandum. "It seeks," he wrote, "to divert the energies of Congress into directions of attaining soul-force and moral excellence, and loses sight of the political aspects of affairs." Then, while paying a tribute to Gandhi's personal character, he criticized him for a tendency to "autocracy and personal rule." Some resentment was felt because Gandhi, before he was sure that he could win Congress, had entrenched himself within the Home Rule League, which he renamed the *Swaraj Sabha*. This rival organization, when he no longer needed it, died a peaceful death.

At the start, for the second time, all the leaders of Congress, except Nehru, opposed Gandhi—C. R. Das, B. C. Pal, Lajpat Rai, Malaviya, Jinnah, Achariar and Khaparde. They were soon overpowered by the

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pressure of the masses. At the end they rallied to him, and it was Das and Lajpat Rai who moved and seconded the resolution which reaffirmed the policy of non-cooperation adopted at Calcutta. The verbal changes in it were of slight importance, save that this time the drastic expedient of tax-resistance was included. The business world was now readier than ever to support a radical policy and to boycott foreign goods, because it felt intense resentment over the fixing of the rupee exchange rate at a level unfavourable to Indian interests.

Gandhiji's triumph at this Congress was completed by the adoption of the draft for a revised constitution, which he had been instructed at the previous session to prepare. In the matter of organization he aimed, first, at enlisting a mass membership, which should include every active-minded man, even among the peasants; the days when Congress interested only the intelligentsia were ended. Secondly, whereas Congress had been in the past little more than a big debating society which went to sleep between its annual sessions, he turned it into a national party capable of prompt action. It still retained its big Congress Committee of 350 elected members, but to this unwieldy body he added a Working Committee of fifteen members, in effect a Cabinet responsible to it, which could hold frequent sittings, guide the strategy of Congress and build up its organization. A new definition completed his transformation of Congress. In its revised creed its object was now defined as "the attainment of *swaraj* by peaceful and legitimate means"; the older word, "constitutional," was dropped. After this memorable session at Nagpur, in the last days of 1920, Gandhiji dominated Congress. The fact that most of its leaders continued to work happily with him is a testimony at once to their integrity and to his lovable personality.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE FIRST STRUGGLE

THERE NOW began for India, with Gandhi as its general, a period of revolutionary struggle and transformation. Indians relied on themselves to win their freedom. "Even God," as the Mahatma put it, "cannot grant *swaraj*; we must earn it ourselves." But to achieve this miracle, they must first alter their whole way of life, their values and their thinking. "Ours is a religious movement designed to purge Indian political life of corruption, deceit, terrorism and the incubus of white superiority." The ferment was at work in every grade of society. It began at the top, where wealthy lawyers followed Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das in abandoning their work in the Law Courts. It reached the peasant, who would walk distances of twenty miles to catch a glimpse of Gandhi as he journeyed from one end of the Peninsula to the other. Sometimes he travelled with one of the Ali brothers, their burly, genial persons contrasting with his frail, emaciated figure; together they roused, by their fraternity, the hopes of Hindus and Muslims alike. The crowds of worshippers, pitiless in their enthusiasm, thronged Gandhi by day and robbed him of his sleep by night. To his disgust they would venerate him as a saint; he had even to rebuke an idolator who painted a portrait of him in the guise of the Lord Krishna. He was "literally sick," he wrote, "of the adoration of the unthinking multitude." A few, but only a few, of the intellectuals agreed with Tagore, who, on his return from a long stay in Europe, found this atmosphere stifling and uttered his warning against the narrow intolerance of the new cult.

Visibly, all India was turning Gandhian. Once-fashionable Indians discarded their European suits and dressed in homespun. Well-to-do women also were taking to *khaddar*. Soon the villages followed the towns in adopting the white "Gandhi" cap. Underneath it, in the

mind of the average man, there reigned a fixed belief that a new era was about to dawn. Gandhi had promised that *swaraj* would be won within one year. No one heeded his qualification—"if there was sufficient response to my programme of non-cooperation." The atmosphere resembled that which has sometimes prevailed in European sects which awaited the Second Coming of Christ on a date "revealed" by prophecy. Fortified by this conviction, it was easy for Gandhi's followers to face the sacrifices he demanded of them. When he asked students to quit the universities, he reminded them that he was asking them only "to suspend their literary studies for one year, or till *swaraj* is established." This period of revolutionary enthusiasm and millenarian hope lasted from the autumn of 1920 into the winter of the next year.

In his speeches and writings of this period we meet a new Gandhi. Though he is always courteous and charitable in speaking of his opponents as persons, he is now unsparing in his denunciation of British "imperialism." He calls it a "satanic system." He does not disguise his revolutionary purpose. "Non-cooperation," he declares, "though a religious and strictly moral movement, aims at the overthrow of the Government." His is "the voice of a nation groaning under iron heels." He now argues, as he never did before, that British rule has impoverished the masses and emasculated the whole people.

Two passages will serve to illustrate his way of thinking at this time:

"There can be no *swaraj* without our feeling and being the equals of Englishmen. Today we feel that we are dependent upon them for our internal and external security, for an armed peace between the Hindus and Mussalmans, for our education and for the supply of daily wants, nay, even for the settlement of our religious squabbles.... The British know our helplessness.... To get *swaraj*, then, is to get rid of our helplessness."

"Let us not mistake reformed councils, more Law Courts and even governorships for real freedom or power. They are but subtler methods of emasculation. The British cannot rule us by mere force. And so they resort to all means, honourable and dishonourable, in order to retain their hold on India. They want

India's billions and they want India's man-power for their imperialistic greed. If we refuse to supply them with men and money, we achieve our goal, namely, *swaraj*, equality, manliness...."

Gandhi understood that a nation cannot gain independence merely by the grant of a political constitution from its overlord. He knew that a country dependent on foreign rulers, alike for her education and for the first material necessities of her daily life, was not yet ripe for independence. But he was sanguine in supposing that what India lacked could be made good within a year.

Critics made merciless fun of his insistence on hand spinning. This did become an obsession with him, but there was more to be said for it than most Europeans grasp. Gandhi understood that the first and simplest explanation of India's abysmal poverty lies in the fact that her gigantic man-power is under-employed or unemployed. Her peasants, during four months of the year, have no work to do in the fields; so he bade them spin. In the short run this was good advice. Gandhi knew that a spinning wheel is a hopelessly uneconomic machine. But it is cheap, needs little skill and can at once bring hope, self-respect and a small supplementary income to families who think in terms of pence, where the westerner thinks of pounds. Again, if he could create (as he did) a demand for home-woven cloth, he would be able to save the skilled hand-weavers, who still contrived in the villages to gain a bare subsistence in competition with the power mills. Finally, he saw in the spinning wheel the means of freeing India from her dependence on Lancashire. With most of what she imported she could, in his view, dispense. But cloth she must have. That is why the *charka* (spinning wheel) became for Gandhi the symbol of *swaraj*. On the tricolour flag which he designed at this time it stood as the emblem of independence, as it now does in the national flag of the Indian Union. And that is why he himself took a vow to spin for half an hour every morning before breaking his fast. For the same reason he sought to impose spinning as a religious duty on every loyal member of Congress.

Gandhiji was now using in his speeches and articles stronger and more polemical language than he had ever used before. But we must not think of him as an exciting or passionate speaker. He had none of the oratorical art in the grand manner which several Indians of the

older generation possessed, among them Srinivasa Sastri. He spoke sitting, for he was not strong enough to stand for long. He made no gestures, though in private talk he would sometimes use his sensitive hands in a most expressive way. He spoke very quietly, with no dramatic modulations of his voice. He could coin a telling phrase, but there were no highly coloured or decorative passages, either in his speeches or in his articles. He tried to persuade and convince his hearers by rational argument. If he moved them, as he certainly did, it was by the plain sincerity with which he conveyed his own strong feelings. There was no conscious art in these speeches, and yet they could sway multitudes by their simple honesty, their obedience to the rule of truth, which was for him the first of the virtues. He believed that he was more effective when he used Hindi than when he used English. That may be so; but his English, spoken with a slight but pleasant Indian intonation, somewhat resembling a Welsh accent, was as fluent and expressive as it was correct, and seemed to be entirely effortless. In conversation he joked easily and happily, but it was not often that he gave rein to his sense of humour in his speeches. Irony or satire was wholly strange to him.

Gandhi was now editing the weekly *Young India*. Fortunately, he had in his devoted secretary, Mahadev Desai, an assistant who relieved him of the routine work; but for this paper, as later for *Harijan*, he wrote in English many hundreds of signed leading articles, which were reproduced by nearly every Indian newspaper in all the languages of this sub-continent. In these he discussed both the events of the day and every phase of his own doctrines.

All the year round Gandhi rose at 4 a.m.; he slept for half an hour in the early afternoon and went to bed at 9.30 p.m. He had, however, the gift of sleeping at will, and occasionally, when fatigue overcame him, he would sleep for a few minutes and rise refreshed. He never omitted his two brief daily walks. The event of the day to which he looked forward most happily was the prayer meeting he conducted among his friends and disciples for half an hour before sunset. Usually hymns from the *Gita* were sung. Christian and Muslim friends were welcomed at these meetings. I recall a moving occasion when the Frontier leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, took part. This man, a Pathan aristocrat and a devout Muslim, with a giant's physique

and a winning smile that revealed his kindliness and honesty, was one of the noblest characters India produced in this generation. He lived a life of voluntary poverty, and spent his energies in trying to educate the backward villagers of the Frontier Province and to raise their standard of life. He strove to wean them from their blood-feuds and to win them for the gospel of non-violence. Like all the outstanding leaders of his day, he had spent many years in prison. He opened the meeting by chanting the daily Islamic invocation of God, and then gave, in Urdu, to a mainly Hindu audience, a warm-hearted address on the underlying unity of all religions. This he did in a time of bitter communal tension, when men of the two creeds were dreading a mass outbreak of fanatical violence. A hymn from the *Gita* was sung, and then Gandhi spoke to the mixed audience, which hung on his words with veneration. In his last years these prayer meetings, held in the open air wherever he happened to be, became public occasions, at which he would say a few words on the events of the day.

For the rest, Gandhi's day was always carefully mapped out. Time was accurately rationed among the innumerable visitors who came to consult him. A clumsy, old-fashioned watch dangled from his waist, and with a joke and a smile he would bring each interview to an end at the exact moment prescribed by his time-table. The most patient and sociable of men, he spent most of his day surrounded by a big family of friends, followers and helpers. His weekly day of silence, Monday, was the device by which he contrived to retire periodically into himself. Had he not trained himself to this methodical rule of life, he could not have become the hand that shaped a nation.

Gandhi had now to bring his habits of method into the daily working of Congress. The programme adopted at Nagpur in the last days of 1920 imposed on its "machine," which had now to be improvised in haste, an enormous task of organization. Its Working Committee now met almost every month, and it had its offices in all the bigger centres of population. In many villages, also, it had its committee room, thronged by its busy volunteers. Gandhi started a systematic drive to increase its membership and its funds. He aimed at a membership of ten millions, but the total never, in fact, rose much above six millions. For the *Tilak Swaraj* Fund, named after the

dead leader, he set a target of Rs.1 crore (£750,000); this was surpassed and a total of £862,500 raised. His next effort was to set the people spinning. He organized the manufacture of a much improved type of spinning wheel, and of these he was soon able to distribute two millions. Lastly, he raised all over India a Volunteer Service Corps, drawn in part from the students, who gave their whole time to the work of Congress. A few of these young men were paid, but, in accordance with his idealization of poverty, what they received was a bare subsistence, Rs.50 monthly—less than £1 a week. One has to remember that under Indian conditions most of them, even the students, would be married men with families. These Volunteers were eventually required to sign an exacting pledge to observe the whole creed of Congress. This meant non-violence, not only in deeds and words, but in “intent” as well. “I am prepared to suffer imprisonment, assault, or even death, for the sake of my religion and my country, without resentment.”

Of the measures of non-cooperation prescribed by Congress, the least successful was the boycott of the Law Courts. Some hundreds of lawyers obeyed the call, and there were distinguished men among them, but the great majority ignored it. Gandhi had called for the setting up of arbitration boards, which should “dispense pure, simple home-made justice, *swadeshi* justice, to our countrymen.” Many were improvised, but they rarely survived these months of excitement.

By contrast, the call to students to quit the Government’s schools and colleges had a measure of temporary success. These “factories for making clerks and government servants,” as Gandhi called them, were not popular institutions, but they were the only road to a career in the public services and the professions. Congress spent much energy and money in creating rival colleges of its own, in which the vernaculars replaced English as the medium of instruction. In these the traditional cultures of India were studied, and even its empirical systems of medicine. But though these colleges sometimes attracted good teachers, they could not confer a degree the Government would recognize. The result was that few of them survived for long, after it became clear that *swaraj* could not be won in a year. The movement had, none the less, its stirring hours, especially in Bengal. In Calcutta, thousands of students refused to sit for their examinations, and flung



themselves down on the steps of the University, so that the defiant few would have to walk over their prostrate bodies. For Muslim students a new national college was created, known as the Jamia Millia Islamia, which survives near Delhi to this day; it became, under Dr. Zakir Husain, a famous centre for educational reform. Many other colleges and schools were suddenly created, all the way from Gujerat to Andhra. For a time they reckoned their students by thousands, and among them were many who afterwards did good service in the nationalist cause. There were, however, many more who sank into the intellectual proletariat and wasted their lives, because they had learned nothing thoroughly.

The attitude of the Government during the early months of 1920 was one of extreme caution. It was reluctant to start repression, and made several attempts to conciliate public opinion. The aged Duke of Connaught visited India, and in a notable speech called on Indians and Englishmen alike "to bury along with the dead past the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past, to forgive where you have to forgive and to join hands and work together to realize the hopes that arise from today." His appeal had little effect. Congress declared a boycott of the ceremonies arranged in his honour. Meanwhile, the tide of excitement was rising among the masses. There had been many strikes in the industrial towns during the previous year, and now the wave reached the remote tea gardens of Assam, whose workers were at this time among the most wretched in India. Gandhi discouraged these movements; it was on disciplined action that he relied; he dreaded an uncontrollable ferment. The Sikhs also were engaged in hot internal struggles within their own community.

Gandhi, meanwhile, refused to give the signal for mass civil disobedience which the people were eagerly awaiting, and tried, as the fever of expectation rose, to divert it into constructive channels. In April he presided over a conference of the "suppressed classes" (Untouchables) at Ahmedabad, and delivered a stirring address in which he encouraged them to claim their full human rights. He found time to concern himself with the problem of the hereditary temple prostitutes (*devadasis*); to them he recommended spinning as a means of earning a livelihood. He was bent, moreover, on using the non-cooperation movement to combat drunkenness. The Government

drew a considerable revenue from the licensed toddy shops.<sup>1</sup> To picket these, so as to deter men from entering them, was now one of the chief duties of the National Volunteers. This led, of course, to continual clashes with the police. The Volunteers did not at this time drill or wear uniforms, as the Caliphate Volunteers did, but as time went on the two organizations tended to coalesce. In April, to the general astonishment, Gandhi had a talk with the new Viceroy, Lord Reading, whom he persuaded not to prosecute the Ali brothers for the reckless speeches they had lately delivered. Under Gandhi's persuasion, the brothers now published an apology for any phrases they had used which might be interpreted as an incitement to violence. One grave instance of violent behaviour by a mob demonstrating on the side of Congress occurred in May, at Malegaon; several policemen were killed in this riot. Apart from this single instance, though thousands of mass-meetings were held, there was as yet no violence.

The Caliphate and Congress movements were running parallel, but it was the former, under the militant leadership of the Ali brothers, which reached its high point first. On 8 July, 1921, its conference met in Karachi and passed with great solemnity a resolution calling on all good Muslims to desert from the Army and the Police. If by December their demands were not conceded, an Indian Republic should be proclaimed. This was backed by a formal *fatwa* (an interpretation of the Canon Law), issued in the name of no less than five hundred divines. Speeches by the Ali brothers proclaimed that it was "unlawful for any faithful Mussalman to serve from that day in the Army or help or acquiesce in recruitment." Here was the first challenge that struck at the sources of the Government's real power. Even then its reaction was slow, for it was not until the third week of September that the Ali brothers were arrested, and with them some of the leading divines who had issued the *fatwa*. Congress backed its Muslim allies loyally. A bold manifesto was published on 4 October over the signatures of Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and about fifty leading Congressmen, in which they declared: "It is the duty of every Indian soldier and civilian to sever

<sup>1</sup> Alcohol is forbidden by the codes of both the Indian religions. It is chiefly the aboriginal tribes who drink toddy. In the towns only the most wretched of the workers frequent the "pubs."

his connexions with the Government and find some other means of livelihood." Next day the Working Committee passed a resolution to the same effect, adding, however, the warning that the deserters must support themselves, for Congress was not yet able to maintain them. On 16 October Congress challenged the Government by repeating and endorsing the Karachi resolution from a thousand platforms. At Trichinopoly Gandhi recited Mohamed Ali's speech word for word and made it his own.

In any other country such a challenge would have been the signal for a revolution. In fact, nothing of much moment happened. The Government ignored Gandhi's defiance, but the Ali brothers were sentenced to two years' imprisonment, and some of the divines to shorter terms. Their appeal to the Army had no perceptible effect. Recruits came chiefly from families of professional soldiers, attached through generations to their ancestral regiments.

What did happen, as an unforeseen by-product of the Caliphate agitation, was the rising of the Moplahs of Malabar which began in August, 1921, and raged for half a year. These Moplahs, who are of distant Arab descent, are Muslim peasants and fishermen whose fanaticism drives them from time to time into violent revolt against their more prosperous Hindu landlords. This time they declared a Holy War, designed to set up what they called a Caliphate Kingdom. In their fanatical excitement they murdered a few Europeans and many Hindu landowners and moneylenders, converted some Hindus to Islam by force and desecrated some temples. Gandhi, who knew no fear, offered to go among them to bring them to reason. His offer was refused and the revolt was suppressed by military force with great slaughter, since the Moplah, like the Frontier *ghazi*, often prefers death to surrender. The savagery of these fanatics towards their Hindu neighbours left painful memories behind it.

Gandhi, who still felt that Indians were not morally ready for mass civil disobedience, was now concentrating on the boycott of foreign cloth. He got from the Committee of Congress a decision requiring all members of Congress to cease from 1 August, 1921, to wear or to use foreign cloth for any purpose whatever, and merchants were required to cancel any orders for it. With the instinct for drama which never failed him, he inaugurated his campaign on that day in

Bombay by kindling an immense bonfire of foreign cloth. On to the flames he tossed indiscriminately costly and beautiful wares, in a spirit which reminds us of another ascetic reformer, Savonarola, and his Florentine bonfire of vanities. As drama this performance was an immense success; it roused the enthusiasm of an enormous crowd. What Gandhi, with all his sensitive perception, did not realize was that he was stirring in the masses of Bombay the instincts of aggression and destruction he most dreaded. This Tagore pointed out in a powerful series of articles in the *Modern Review*, critical of the whole course and conception of the non-cooperation movement. Gandhi wrote a reply to "the Great Sentinel," in which he restated his fixed views about *swadeshi*. "The cities," he wrote, "live upon the villages. . . . India is daily growing poorer. . . . In losing the spinning wheel we lost our left lung. We are, therefore, suffering from galloping consumption. . . . It is a sin to wear foreign cloth. . . . In burning my foreign clothes I burn my shame."

At last, on 5 November, the All-India Committee of Congress, meeting at Delhi, authorized its provincial organizations to start mass civil disobedience in the form of a refusal to pay land-tax, at their discretion. It had also to prepare for the long-expected visit of the Prince of Wales. In Bombay, where the royal visitor was to land, £60,000 (Rs.8 lakhs) were spent on display at a time when, as Gandhi put it, millions were suffering from chronic starvation. On the day of the Prince's arrival he was greeted from one end of India to the other with a *hartal* of protest and mourning that brought all organized activity to a full stop. It was a startling demonstration of the new spirit of the nation, and everywhere it was non-violent, except in Bombay. There Gandhi greeted the Prince with yet another bonfire of foreign cloth. But in Bombay the *hartal* was not complete. Part of the population, including many of the wealthy Parsees, welcomed the Prince as he drove through the city and attended the loyal celebrations. This incensed the Muslim and Hindu mob in the mill quarter, which fell on some of the loyalists, beat them up, sacked their dwellings and set fire to some toddy shops and tramcars. Gandhi, when he heard of it, went to the scene of destruction, harangued the mob and succoured two dying policemen. But at the moment he failed to restore peace, and it was only after distributing vast quantities of

leaflets, mobilizing all the Congress Volunteers and imposing a five-day fast upon himself, that he succeeded, on the fourth day, in bringing the riots to an end. The casualties amounted to fifty-three killed and four hundred injured. During these days Gandhi said in his bitterness that *swaraj* stank in his nostrils. He now, until further orders, suspended mass civil disobedience, which was about to begin in the Bardoli district of Gujerat.

Another great occasion in the Prince's visit to India was his reception in Calcutta, timed for Christmas Day. The Viceroy was willing to pay a high price for peace. Jinnah and Pandit Malaviya started negotiations with him which came near to success. But he would not release the Ali brothers, nor would he concede a point on which Gandhi insisted, the legality of peaceful picketing, vital for the boycott of cloth. The negotiations, therefore, failed and a complete but peaceful *hartal* held the greatest of India's cities in its grip during the Prince's reception. Madras, at a later date, was equally hostile, but there some rioting occurred. There were other centres in which the Prince met with a friendlier welcome.

The *annus mirabilis*, the year in which *swaraj* was to be won, was almost at its end when Congress held its annual session at Ahmedabad. The atmosphere was tense; the climax could not be delayed much longer. Most of the leaders were in prison—C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai, the Ali brothers, Abul Kalam Azad and, among the younger men, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose. The total number of political prisoners now stood at twenty thousand; in another month it rose to fifty thousand. The National Volunteers had now been proclaimed an illegal body. All meetings were forbidden. Congress at this session called on every young man of eighteen or over to join this banned volunteer organization, but more especially the students. The debates were brief, for the only opposition, if one can so describe it, came from the impatient Left Wing. It was a theologian, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, president for the year of the Muslim League, who proposed that Congress should demand immediate and unqualified independence for India. This claim Gandhi dismissed as irresponsible "levity," which would lead the movement into "depths unfathomable." Preparing for the last round of the struggle, since it foresaw further arrests, Congress invested Gandhi,

and any successor he might name, with "sole executive authority."

It is not easy to follow Gandhiji's thinking during these critical days and weeks. In all his writings and speeches it was the need for sacrifice and suffering that he stressed. He exhorted his followers to "court arrest," but only in an atmosphere of "calm." At moments he was so sanguine that he believed that Lord Reading might soon summon a Round Table Conference to work out the grant of a Dominion Constitution for India. He made a singular suggestion as to the method by which this Constitution should be drawn up. A Constituent Assembly should be elected by all members of Congress who had paid their four-anna subscription and signed its creed; the Constitution it drafted must then be adopted unchanged by the British Parliament. Gandhi was not alone in believing in the possibility of a prompt solution by some sort of Round Table Conference, for an all-party Peace Conference, held in Bombay early in January under such sober moderates as Jinnah, Jayakar and Malaviya, made this proposal only to have it summarily rejected by the Viceroy. From day to day, dictator though he now was, Gandhi seemed to vacillate. Guntur, a district in Andhra, had for long been ready for tax-resistance, and had fulfilled all the conditions. Gandhi first assented, then refused and finally gave what reads like a somewhat ambiguous assent, though apparently it was not so intended. Actually, mass civil disobedience began in Guntur on 12 January, 1922. Its unanimity was so nearly perfect that only five per cent of the peasants paid their taxes.

At last, on 1 February, 1922, Gandhi launched his challenge to the Government in the form of an open letter to the Viceroy. Though it was couched in courteous language, it was an undisguised ultimatum. It complained of the "virulent repression, unworthy of a civilized government," for which the Viceroy was responsible. This, Gandhi argued, was a departure from "the civilized policy" laid down by the Viceroy at the time of the Ali brothers' apology—"that the Government of India should not interfere with the activities of non-cooperation, so long as they remained non-violent in word and deed." Gandhi informed Lord Reading that Bardoli, "a small Tehsil" with about eighty-seven thousand inhabitants, had decided to embark on mass civil disobedience, and that he might consent to the

same action at Guntur, "a group of a hundred villages." He thus underlined the small scale of the aggressive action that was about to begin. This said, he "respectfully urged" the Viceroy to "revise his policy," to release all non-violent non-cooperating prisoners," and "to declare in clear terms the policy of absolute non-interference with all non-violent activities." "If you can see your way," he went on, "to make the necessary declaration within seven days of the date of publication of this manifesto, I shall be prepared to advise postponement of civil disobedience of an aggressive character. . . ."

This puzzling document calls for some analysis. The chief point to note is that Gandhi offered to call off mass civil disobedience without securing any of the purposes for which Congress and its Muslim allies were struggling—*swaraj*, such a settlement as they could approve with Turkey, and the redress of the Punjab wrongs. He did not even ask for a Round Table Conference. What he did demand was what no government could possibly concede—the right of an opposition to engage in any form whatever of hostile action, provided it was non-violent. In concrete terms, this included the right explicitly claimed in the manifesto of five hundred divines, to ask soldiers and civil servants to desert their posts. Why did he take this eccentric line of argument? Was it because *satyagraha* had become for him the most important thing in life, more important than *swaraj* or the Caliphate?

The Viceroy replied to this ultimatum in a memorandum which said the obvious thing—that the country had now to choose between lawlessness, with all its consequences, and the maintenance of those principles which lie at the root of all civilized government. Gandhi's lengthy reply gave further details backing his charge of "virulent repression," but added nothing to the substance of his argument.

Before the seven days' time limit had expired, there happened, on 5 February, 1922, at Chauri Chaura in the United Provinces, a ghastly local tragedy, which changed the course of Indian history. Twenty-one policemen and an inspector were done to death, not without provocation, by an infuriated mob, and some were burned alive.

For Gandhi this hideous act of violence, though it happened in a village hundreds of miles away from Bardoli, was decisive. He determined to put an end to mass civil disobedience. Calling the

Working Committee together on 12 February at Bardoli, he persuaded it, evidently with some difficulty, to approve of his decision. It suspended mass civil disobedience indefinitely, together with "every other activity of an offensive character," and instructed the peasants to pay land revenue and other taxes. All processions and "public meetings for the defiance of authority should be stopped." Gandhi imposed on himself a five days' fast. At the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Delhi, on 24 February, a resolution of censure was moved against him but found little support. By way of compromise, individual civil disobedience under the strictest conditions was now to be allowed. For the rest, the movement was to concentrate on "constructive" tasks, especially spinning, the organizing of national schools and temperance work.

The consequences of this ending of the struggle were disastrous. The Muslims reeled under the blow, and it was never again possible to restore the confidence and fraternity that had united the two communities during this brief period of alliance. The Hindus, though better able to understand the working of Gandhi's mind, were only a little less dismayed. From behind the bars of their prisons, Motilal Nehru and Lajpat Rai sent long letters of remonstrance to the Mahatma, which he dismissed with the tactless comment that as prisoners they were "civilly dead" and were not entitled to express an opinion. Subhas Bose, who was imprisoned with C. R. Das, reports that he was "beside himself with anger and sorrow." Even Jawaharlal Nehru admits that Gandhi's action "brought about a certain demoralization." It is hard to guess how much, given the many embarrassments of the Empire in Ireland and the Middle East, might have been won in 1922 by an unflinching revolutionary leadership. In a dispatch to Whitehall, dated 9 February, the Viceroy, after mentioning the disaffection of "the lower classes in the towns" and of the peasantry all over Northern India, said that "a large proportion of the Mohammedan population throughout the country were embittered and sullen." He was prepared, he said, for "grave possibilities," and did not minimize his "great anxiety." Three days later his fears were allayed.

Gandhi's own view was set out in two articles in *Young India*, as moving as they are manifestly sincere:



"God has been abundantly kind to me. He has warned me the third time that there is not as yet in India that truthful and non-violent atmosphere which, and which alone, can justify mass disobedience which can be at all described as civil, which means gentle, truthful, humble, knowing, wilful yet loving, never criminal and hateful."

He tells us that he had to resist Satan, who told him that it was "cowardly" to withdraw after his "pompous threat to the Government."

"The drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound, and I venture to assure the doubters that the country will have gained by my humiliation and confession of error.

"The only virtue I want to claim is Truth and Non-violence. . . . My services have many limitations, but God has up to now blessed them in spite of the imperfections.

"For confession of error is like a broom that sweeps away dirt and leaves the surface cleaner than before."

Gandhi went on to argue that the Congress organization was still faulty. For its imperfections and for the brutal violence at Chauri Chaura he felt that he had not done penance enough.

"I must undergo personal cleansing. I must become a fitter instrument, able to register the slightest variation in the moral atmosphere about me. My prayers must have much deeper truth and humility about them than they evidence. And for me there is nothing so helpful and cleansing as a fast."

He does not wish others to imitate him by fasting. His readers will be better employed "in daily and religiously spinning for a fixed time . . . in visiting untouchable homes and finding out their wants . . . in visiting the homes which the drink curse is desolating. . . ."

The cheerfulness of Gandhi's conclusion is the most startling thing in this strange and moving document:

"If we learn the full lesson of this tragedy, we can turn a curse into a blessing. By becoming truthful and non-violent, both in spirit and deed, and by making the *swadeshi*, i.e. the *khaddar*

programme, complete, we can establish full *swaraj* and redress the Caliphate and the Punjab wrongs without a single person having to offer civil disobedience."

I have quoted Gandhi at length, because no words of my own could render his state of mind adequately. Sometimes this enigmatic genius seems to be acting and thinking like a contemporary European, and then suddenly he dives into the Middle Ages. In order to understand him we have to use our historical imagination, as if we were studying the life of St. Francis or Savonarola. The puzzle is to grasp as a single harmonious personality Gandhi the tactician and organizer and Gandhi the saint. Let us glance rapidly at his astonishing record from 1919 to 1922. First he revives the formidable device of the *hartal*. Then he perceives the possibilities of the Caliphate agitation, links it up with the *swaraj* movement, and knits Muslims and Hindus, as never before or since, into a single nation. Next he engineers a series of accomplished facts, so that Congress, against the will of its leaders, must accept his programme of non-cooperation. This done, he converts Congress, hitherto only a talking-shop for intellectuals, into a vast mass organization capable of action. With his prophecy of *swaraj* in one year, he produces an emotional ferment in which millions are prepared to do and suffer whatever he commands. Everything is ready for the decisive trial of strength, the refusal to pay taxes. But now the saint takes charge of his strategy. First, he limits the defiance to one little district, or at most to two. Then he launches his ultimatum, not to win *swaraj* or the Caliphate demand, but only to secure the right to agitate. Finally, overwhelmed by his horror of violence, he sounds the retreat, just as the decisive battle is about to begin. With his whole movement in collapse, he persuades himself that *swaraj* can be won by spinning cotton yarn "religiously" and by visiting the homes of drunkards.

There were not two Gandhis, the saint and the tactician. The key to the puzzle is that Gandhiji thought and acted on two planes, one of them physical, the other moral. Sometimes he talked, and seemed to be acting, as if he accepted the "common-sense" mechanical or psychological interpretations of life, society and politics which his contemporaries assumed. But for him there was a second world. He believed literally in God's government of the universe. When he

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said that God gave him three warnings about violence, he was not using a figure of speech. When he said that God had blessed his services, he meant that some system of spiritual or ethical causation was at work, which saw to it that efforts made in the right state of mind, and only these, would produce the desired result. That is why one must spin "religiously" in order to get *swaraj*. A characteristic habit of his illustrates this belief. Whenever he wrote an important letter to the Viceroy, he would not send it through the post; he chose "a pure-hearted messenger" to carry it. This was not a fad; a sinful messenger might have contaminated it. Again, to give an instance of his belief in what I have called ethical causation, he seriously believed that the terrible earthquake in Bihar in 1934 was a punishment for India's sin of untouchability.<sup>1</sup> An English Puritan mystic in the seventeenth century might have said the same thing.

We must beware, then, of supposing that when he talked of tax-resistance he meant what we do. We should say that if all, or most, or even many Indians had refused to pay taxes, automatically the Government would have gone bankrupt and collapsed. The problem is merely quantitative—to get enough of them to do it. We might concede that a "token" campaign in one typical district might suffice. A wise Government would argue: "If Bardoli can do this today, the rest of India will do it tomorrow." I doubt whether Gandhi ever reasoned in this way. To begin with, I do not believe that he ever seriously contemplated tax-refusal on a big or nation-wide scale. Certainly he never prepared it, and he discountenanced an easy form of it which the Bengalis were eager to adopt—a refusal to pay the police (*chowkidar*) rates. In short, he was not thinking in quantitative terms at all, nor of any effect that could be measured in millions of rupees. What he believed was that, if a number of pure-minded men voluntarily endured suffering for a cause, it would, in accordance with the moral laws of God's universe, succeed. This belief in the efficacy of self-suffering runs through all his writings, and it was, though in a cruder form, a fixed element in Indian tradition. Astrorites confer power. Gandhi's addition to this ancient wisdom was that the self-sufferer must make his sacrifice in a "proud, truthful, humble, loving" spirit. This was, all the time, the deep meaning of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 277.

that inspired him, the theory of cosmic causality on which he acted, though on the surface of his day-to-day mind he knew very well that it would be awkward for the "satanic" British Government to lose rupees. He called off mass civil disobedience because this moral chain of causality was broken by violence, and for no other reason.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout this year and a half of revolutionary agitation, the Government jailed fifty thousand of the lesser offenders, but it did not touch the chief rebel. It waited until Gandhi's popularity had reached its lowest ebb, and then it struck. He was arrested at his *ashram* on 13 March, 1922, and appeared with his disciple Shankerlal Banker at Ahmedabad before Mr. Broomfield on 18 March. The charge was one of sedition, based upon three of his recent articles in *Young India*. When Gandhi entered, his frail figure clad only in a loin-cloth, the whole courthouse rose to do him honour. He pleaded guilty, and asked only to be allowed to make a verbal statement. In this he accepted virtually all that the Advocate-General had said about him. To preach disaffection towards the existing system of government had become a passion with him. He accepted full responsibility for the outrages at Bombay, Madras and Chauri Chaura. "I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk, and if I was set free, I would still do the same. . . . I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act; I am here, therefore, to invite and submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me, for what in law is a deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen."

In a written statement he described the experiences that had turned him from a loyalist into a rebel. He recounted his services with his ambulance in South Africa and his recruiting work in Gujerat. Then came the Rowlatt Act, the events in the Punjab and the Prime Minister's behaviour towards the Muslims.

<sup>1</sup> Had he another reason? Indian communists argue that he called off tax-refusal in the interests of the landlords (*zemindars*). I should explain for the benefit of the English reader that over the greater part of Northern India the rural tenant-cultivator pays his rent and his land-tax together to the *zemindar*, who retains a proportion, usually about half of the lump sum. It follows that the tenant cannot withhold his tax without withholding his rent also. This complication, however, did not apply to Bardoli, or to Guntur, where the peasants own the land. Mr. Palme Dutt's whole argument on this subject is vitiated by his failure to realize that Bardoli is a *ryotwari* (peasant-owner) district, in which the question of landlord's interests does not arise. (See his *India Today*, p. 316.)

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"I came reluctantly to the conclusion that the British connexion had made India more helpless than she ever was before, politically and economically. She has become so poor that she has little power of resisting famines. . . . No sophistry, no jugglery in figures, can explain away the evidence the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. . . . I hold it to be a virtue to be disaffected towards a government which in its totality has done more harm to India than any previous system. India is less manly under British rule than she ever was before. . . . I believe that I have rendered a service to India and England by showing, in non-cooperation, the way out of the unnatural state in which both are living."

The judge then addressed Gandhi, not merely with courtesy but with respect. "In the eyes of millions of your countrymen you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble, and even saintly, life. . . . But you have made it impossible for any government to leave you at liberty." And so, following the precedent set in the case of Tilak, he sentenced Gandhi to imprisonment for six years.

Gandhi had published his instructions for this event some time before it happened. The country obeyed him; there were no demonstrations and no *hartals*. Then followed a consequence the Government may not have foreseen. The mistakes of this prisoner were forgotten. What impressed the continents that heard his statement was the dignity and courage of this man, who personified the silent millions of India. The accused had become the accuser. As he disappeared behind the gates of his prison, the masses felt once more towards him the loyalty and affection which the events of the previous month had clouded. He was still their leader and their hero. The Government, by putting him on trial, made a mistake which it never repeated. After this experience it always imprisoned him untried.

## CHAPTER XIII

### RETREAT AND RALLY

**P**RISON MEANT for Gandhiji a long rest after an intolerable strain. He escaped from the crowds; the perplexities of strategy were at an end, and the crushing responsibilities of leadership. "I am as happy as a bird"—so he wrote to Andrews a few days after his arrest. Yeravda Prison, in which he was confined, is a gloomy and forbidding pile, but the air of Poona, in the highlands of the Mahratta country, is refreshing. The more distinguished guests with whom His Majesty had had a difference of political opinion fared not too ill. Prisoners were rarely kept in solitary confinement; they could read and they could write. Gandhi, whose notions of rest were strenuous, could now spend the long days in systematic study. "I used to sit down to my books," he wrote in retrospect, "with the delight of a young man of twenty-four, and forget my four-and-fifty years and my poor health." He studied over again the Hindu classics, the Koran and the Bible. He learned the unfamiliar Dravidian language, Tamil. He read Walter Scott and Ben Jonson, his old favourites Tolstoy and Ruskin, Emerson and Thoreau and, for the first time, the German mystic, Jakob Boehme.

As he regained his mental energy, he dictated in Gujerati to a fellow-prisoner his lengthy autobiography, which Mahadev Desai translated into English under the title: *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. It ranks high among the world's great books written in prison. In the frankness of its self-revelation it recalls Rousseau's *Confessions*. It would be hard to say which part of it makes the more fascinating reading—the early chapters which describe his school-days, his adolescence, his marriage and his life as a student in London; or the absorbing narrative of his moral development and his struggle in South Africa. That story could not have been better told,

and our only regret is that his account of his doings after his return to India is slighter. In this book Gandhi will live for posterity as the noblest and bravest character of our time.

Beyond the prison walls, meanwhile, during the two years while Gandhi wrote and studied, the Indian political landscape was rapidly changing. The chief and, in the long run, the most decisive of these changes was the decline and collapse of the Caliphate movement. It rested on a false foundation. While Indian Muslims, under the dynamic leadership of the Ali brothers, were reviving the romantic, old-world traditions of Islamic theocracy, the Turks, in whose interests they believed they were acting, were tossing it aside as medieval lumber. When Kemal Pasha won his victory over the Greeks and recovered the "rich and renowned lands" of Asia Minor and Thrace, he made it clear that the new nationalist Turkey cared nothing for the Holy Places of Arabia and even less for the Caliphate. The Ottoman Empire came to an end; a secular republic took its place. In November, 1922, the Caliph himself, Sultan Mahomet VI, fled on a British warship to Malta. In his place, his cousin Abdul Majid was named Caliph, but deprived of his temporal power. His enjoyment of his spiritual authority was brief. In March, 1924, the last of the Caliphs was deposed and exiled.

So ended the myth for which Muslim India had made her rebellion. The Caliphate movement collapsed, and with it crumbled the foundation on which Gandhi and the Ali brothers had built their fraternal alliance of Muslims and Hindus. For a short while the brothers were still active in Congress, but they gradually became absorbed in the interests of their own community. Among Hindus, also, the sectarian spirit took new and aggressive forms. The Moplah outbreak started the discord. There began, while Gandhi was helpless in prison, a series of communal riots, which raged with brief intervals for many years and surpassed in bitterness the records of the past. Muslims were suffering from frustration. They were still bitter; they were still angry; and so, since they could no longer battle for the Caliphate, they turned on their Hindu neighbours. Once awakened, religious fanaticism is not easily allayed.

Congress, meanwhile, was experiencing the inevitable reaction after the high hopes of 1921 and the disappointment of 1922. For a

time the Government intensified its repression, though no one challenged it. The membership dropped to a fraction of the total it had reached. The bolder spirits among the leaders talked of resuming mass civil disobedience, but a commission which was sent travelling all over India had to report that it nowhere found a spirit which would justify a return to aggressive tactics. Congress maintained, all along the line, its attitude of non-cooperation, and went on promoting the National Schools and village *panchayats*. But many of its leaders, especially C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru, were opposing the most questionable aspect of Gandhi's tactics, the boycott of the reformed Councils. This condemned Congress to political impotence, while in some provinces rival parties were able to consolidate themselves—notably the Justice Party in Madras and the Unionist Party in the Punjab. Das and his friends were for entering the Councils and using them for an active strategy of protest and obstruction. They called for a change in this respect at the annual session of Congress which met at Gaya at the end of 1922. The feeling of loyalty to Gandhi while he lay in prison was, however, against them, and the majority voted for no change. They then decided to form an independent *Swarajist* party and contest the next elections. At a special Congress, held at Delhi in September, the previous decision was modified, and the *Swarajists* were permitted to go their own way. They did well in the elections, especially in Bengal.

In prison, though he went on working, Gandhiji's health grew steadily worse. He refused the special privileges accorded to him, because they were denied to his fellow-prisoners. On 12 January, 1924, his alarming illness was diagnosed as acute appendicitis and he was removed to Poona hospital. There, at night, amid a violent thunderstorm, Colonel Maddock operated on him. His electric torch fused during the operation, which was completed by the light of a hurricane lamp. For some days Gandhi's life was in danger, but very slowly he recovered. He and his English surgeon became warm friends and he always spoke of this experience with deep gratitude. It modified one of his strongest prejudices, for he had written about European medicine, and especially surgery, with ignorant contempt, and had even described hospitals as "institutions for propagating sin"—so firm was his belief in Nature as the healer of all ailments.



Later, on 5 February, Colonel Maddock had the pleasure of informing him that the Government had released him unconditionally. The news brought him neither joy nor relief; he would have preferred to serve his full sentence of six years.

Early in March, Gandhiji went to Juhu, on the seashore outside Bombay, and there, as he grew well enough to enjoy the beauty of the landscape, he very slowly recovered. In April, much too soon, he resumed his editing of *Young India*. Before his strength was fit for the strain, he had to face the two problems that dominated the next six years of his life—the attitude Congress should adopt to the reformed Councils and the alarming outbreak of the Hindu-Muslim feud.

During the spring and summer of 1924 a wave of communal riots swept over Northern India. The Muslims had been roused by the publication of a scurrilous life of their Prophet, entitled *Rangila Rasul*; its Hindu author was eventually murdered. These riots began in Delhi, spread to six other towns and culminated at Kohat in the Frontier Province, from which the Hindu minority of four thousand persons was driven out, after thirty-six had been killed and a hundred and forty-five wounded. Congress appointed Gandhi and his close friend Shaukat Ali to report on this outbreak, but they were unable to agree in their findings.

Gandhi was so horrified by this crime that he imposed on himself, weak though he still was, a penitential fast of twenty-one days. He believed that he had received in prayer the assurance that the obligation to perform this penance had been laid upon him directly by God. Now and always he was convinced that each of us is responsible for what his neighbours do. He held himself guilty for the sins and infirmities of his own people. The fast was, therefore, "a matter between himself and God for his own self-purification." "I believe," he wrote, "in the absolute oneness of God, and therefore of humanity. . . . I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul, nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous." This was Gandhi's mystical way of stating a truth that is fundamental to any honest view of social morality. We all have our share of responsibility, be it by omission or commission, for what goes wrong in the world. If the men of Kohat were ignorant and passionate fanatics, was not all India, including its British rulers, to blame for their moral and

intellectual illiteracy? Gandhi, we may think, was the least to blame of all their neighbours. All the more does the limitless devotion of this man, as selfless as he was sensitive, compel our veneration. This we must feel even if we reject the psychology and the theology based on the father-image, sometimes gentle, sometimes vengeful, that underlay his belief in the value of penance and self-inflicted suffering. His fast moved Indians profoundly, as well it might, and a Unity Conference of Hindus and Muslims, which Bishop Westcott of Calcutta also attended, was held at Delhi during his ordeal. Some good came of his sacrifice. For a year the riots ceased. But soon they began again with outbreaks on a bigger scale than ever, especially at Calcutta in 1926. One of the ugliest events of this time was the murder by a Muslim fanatic of Swami Shraddhanand on his sickbed—the same Hindu thinker who had preached in the Great Mosque in Delhi in 1919. Gandhi came near despair, and sadly admitted “that he had been found wanting as a physician prescribing a cure for this malady.” In truth, there is no easy cure.

Gandhi had now to adjust himself to the new political problem which had arisen during his imprisonment. C. R. Das and the two Nehrus visited him during his convalescence at Juhu, but though they talked things over as the affectionate friends they were, they could only agree to differ. For Gandhi, there were only two tolerable alternatives—either to work the new reforms in a responsive spirit, which was the course he had favoured in 1919, or else total non-cooperation and the boycott of the Councils, which he had advocated since 1920. The middle course of making the inadequate reforms unworkable by opposition within the Councils was always repugnant to him. Since he realized that the majority of Congress agreed in this matter with Das and Motilal Nehru he kept aloof from politics and flung himself with all his emotional ardour into a campaign for hand-spinning and the boycott of foreign cloth. If he could bring Congress to take up these two policies of his in earnest, he cared little what else it did. His first step was, as it turned out, an unwise one. At a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in June, 1924, he induced the majority to adopt a rule by which every congressman elected to any office or committee must pay his subscription, not in cash, but in the form of 2,000 yards of self-spun yarn which he must contribute every

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month. Das and his friends walked out in protest. On this same occasion he was deeply distressed and wept in public because some leading congressmen, Das among them, were reluctant to adopt a strongly worded condemnation of the murder of an Englishman by a Bengali terrorist. Experience soon proved that this obligation of compulsory spinning could not be enforced.

At the annual session of Congress at Belgaum in the last days of 1924, Gandhi went even further. In his presidential address he spoke only about spinning and the cloth boycott, and he now induced Congress to alter its franchise so that every rank-and-file member (as well as the office-bearers) must contribute his 2,000 yards of self-spun yarn instead of the four-anna subscription. At the same time, Gandhi agreed to a new definition of the programme of non-cooperation, which virtually ended it, save that the boycott of foreign cloth was still stressed and, indeed, intensified. In other words, he tacitly agreed to Council entry, and the *Swarajist* Party was formally recognized a few months later as the political arm of Congress. The fact was that the *Swarajists* as a body, and Das in particular, were intellectuals who were critical of Gandhi's tactics and out of sympathy with his deeply emotional temperament. They knew, however, that they needed him to win the masses, who loved him and venerated him and no one else. There was at this time a just perceptible note of bitterness in some of Gandhi's utterances, and even of sarcasm, a weapon he seldom used. He used to refer to the intellectuals as "educated Indians," which really meant "westernized." "I must no longer," he wrote, "stand in the way of the Congress being developed and guided by educated Indians rather than by one like myself, who has thrown in his lot entirely with the masses, and who has fundamental differences with the mind of educated India as a body. I still want to act upon them, but not leading the Congress. The best way in which I can help that activity is by removing myself out of the way and by concentrating myself solely upon constructive work."

Nine months after its adoption the yarn franchise was virtually abandoned; that is to say, it was made optional; only 18,000 members had qualified by spinning. Gandhi's constructive work was made over to the All-India Spinners' Association, which ranked, however, as an autonomous department of Congress. At the Kanpur (Cawnpore)

session, in the last days of 1925, Gandhi retired from the leadership and took for a year a vow of "political silence and immobility." His only contribution to politics was negative, for at the Gauhati Congress in 1926 he once more opposed a resolution in favour of the adoption of independence as the goal of the movement. The *Swara-jists*, meanwhile, were engaged in an endless series of sterile controversies over the detailed application of their tactics of obstruction. Das was veering towards a policy of cooperation, when his brilliant career was cut short by his early death in June, 1925. To my thinking the tactics of obstruction were justified, for they convinced even British Conservatives that the system of dyarchy was unworkable. The political leadership now fell to the elder Nehru, who was united to Gandhi by a warm personal affection, though he, too, was fundamentally a "westerner."

Gandhiji spent these years of retreat in incessant work to popularize the spinning wheel. He travelled all over India, struggling with poor health and overwhelming fatigue. He suffered from the too-pressing attentions of the crowds which thronged him, content if they could only see him, and overjoyed if they succeeded in touching the Mahatma's feet. The noise he had to endure in each village through which he passed almost drove him distracted. Latterly, he had to refuse to address more than one meeting a day; these gatherings seldom numbered less than ten thousand persons; occasionally, it is said, as many as a hundred thousand were present. In the towns, millions heard from his own mouth, thanks to the microphone, his message about the *charka*, Hindu-Muslim unity, temperance and the sin of untouchability. In his battle against this curse, he had now many local victories to his credit, even in the priest-ridden South.

The most startling of these occurred at Vaikam in Travancore. There the main highway, which passed close to a temple and the quarter inhabited by Brahmins, had been closed for centuries to Untouchables. A disciple of Gandhi's, George Joseph, a Syrian Christian, tried to open it by escorting an Untouchable along it. He was beaten, arrested and, with others who afterwards joined him, sentenced to imprisonment, in some cases for terms of twelve months. The police then threw a cordon across the road. The volunteers took their stand in front of it, day after day, month after month, in an

attitude of prayer. They remained at their posts, even when a torrential flood compelled them to stand up to their waists in water. At last, after sixteen months, the Brahmins gave way, and the highways were opened to the Untouchables, not only here, but all over Travancore. Again, Gandhi would cite in all his speeches the case of a young Brahmin disciple who voluntarily threw away his sanctity and himself performed, day after day, the unpleasant work of an Untouchable sweeper and scavenger. In other ways also Gandhi was breaking down superstitious tabus; he horrified the orthodox by advocating the killing of mad dogs; in his own *ashram* he ended the suffering of a sick and sacred calf by a painless death.

There now opened a new phase in Indian history, which soon recalled Gandhi to active leadership. On 5 November, 1927, the new Viceroy, Lord Irwin (afterwards Lord Halifax), summoned Gandhi with other notables to Delhi. After a journey of a thousand miles, a sheet of paper was handed to him; that was the only business at this superfluous ceremony. The document reported the nomination of the Simon Commission. Sir John Simon (as he was then), with six other members of the two Houses of Parliament, was charged with the duty of reporting on the working of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, and on the readiness of India for a further advance towards self-government. The step was well meant, but it showed a fatal lack of psychology. "God's Englishmen" (it was Baldwin who resurrected Milton's proud phrase) were to judge whether Indians were fit to govern themselves. To this Indians were not disposed to submit; their claim was for the right of self-determination. Even the Liberal moderates were shocked because not a single Indian sat on the Commission—an arrangement which could be defended, because its duty was to report to Parliament.

Instinctively, the demand arose that the Commission, during its tour, should be boycotted. After a numbing sleep of five years the nationalist spirit awakened. There were soon other signs of a new militancy among the masses; a wave of strikes roused the exploited industrial workers. The upper middle class was also embittered by the adoption of an exchange rate for the rupee at 1s. 6d. instead of 1s. 4d., which prejudiced Indian commercial interests. Congress took the lead in calling for a total boycott of the Simon Commission. The

response recalled the revolutionary days of 1921, though this time the violence was all on the side of the police. A nation-wide *hartal* greeted the Commission when it landed. In each of the big cities its arrival led to vast demonstrations, which waved black flags and chanted: "Go back, Simon." Though these crowds were peaceful, they were dispersed by *lathi* charges. In one of these, at Lahore, Lajpat Rai was struck over the heart; soon afterwards he died. Jawaharlal Nehru also was beaten. The refusal to recognize the Commission was general; it was only some of the moderates and the minorities who gave evidence before it.

India's political leaders, realizing that vital decisions lay ahead of them, were now formulating their own demands. Within Congress Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, the brilliant but erratic Bengali leader, were now organizing the younger generation into a Left wing which was beginning to think on Socialist lines. At the Madras Congress at the end of 1927 they at last carried their definition of India's goal as "complete independence." Gandhi was not present at the debate, but in an article in *Young India* he repeated his now familiar rebuke: "The Congress stultifies itself by repeating year after year resolutions of this character, when it knows that it is not capable of carrying them into effect." In spite of this resolution, the elder Nehru and the great Liberal lawyer, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, were charged, as the leading members of an all-party committee, with the duty of preparing a draft dominion constitution. It turned out to be a very moderate document. It failed to win general support at an all-party conference held at Lucknow in August. The Muslims would have nothing to do with it; Shaukat Ali was as much opposed to it as Jinnah and the Aga Khan. When it came before Congress at its Calcutta session in late December, 1928, it provoked some clashes between Left and Right, for the younger Nehru and Subhas Bose were in earnest over their claim for independence. Gandhi now stepped in, after some rather painful disputes, and moved a compromise, which was carried by an overwhelming majority. Congress gave the British Parliament exactly one year in which to adopt the elder Nehru's constitution in its entirety; failing this, Congress would "organize a campaign of non-violent non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation." At Calcutta, Congress was rudely

confronted with the fact that the industrial workers, under communist leadership, were now in a revolutionary mood. Impatient at the suggestion of a year's delay, some fifty thousand of them marched to its meeting place, saluted the national flag and then invaded and occupied its pavilion, where their leaders carried a resolution in favour of immediate independence.

Congress, by these decisions taken at Calcutta, issued its ultimatum, with a year's delay. Gandhi had intended to undertake a European tour during 1929, but he realized that he would be called to lead the coming struggle, and he decided to stay in India to prepare for it. The preparations ran on the old lines. Congress tightened its organization and enlisted new members and volunteers, but the emphasis was still laid, as before, on "constructive" activities—the cloth boycott, spinning, temperance and untouchability. One new feature emerged: stress was now laid on the removal of women's disabilities and their enlistment in the active work of Congress. For the interpretation of Gandhi's outlook on life one must not forget his mother's formative influence. From her he derived his habit of taking vows and she set the example of fasting. His originality lay largely in the fact that female tendencies were at least as strong in his mental make-up as male. They were evident, for example, in his love of children, in the pleasure he took in playing with them, and in the devotion he showed as a sick-nurse. His beloved spinning wheel has always been a woman's tool. And is not *satyagraha*, the method of conquering by self-suffering, a woman's tactic? The polar opposition between violence and self-suffering is really a contrast between male and female patterns of behaviour. In Gandhi, the conservative and pacifist, his mother lived on; the male fighting instinct in him made him a rebel and a reformer.

An event of the previous year (1928) came as a great encouragement to Gandhi and confirmed his faith in the soundness of his tactics. One of the periodical re-assessments of land revenue was carried out in the Bardoli district, and taxes were raised generally by 22 per cent, and in some cases by much more. The peasants turned to Vallabhbhai Patel, and he, with Gandhi's blessing, organized *satyagraha* in the shape of a collective refusal to pay. The Government replied with the severest measures of repression. The lands of

the peasants were seized and put up to auction; their buffaloes were taken; many peasants were imprisoned for long terms. Through it all they stood firm, and there was no violence. In the end, after threatening to crush the movement, the Government was persuaded to hold an official inquiry which, on the whole, found for the peasants. The assessments were raised, not by 22 per cent, but by 5 per cent; the prisoners were freed and the confiscated lands restored. Though this was not a political struggle, it pointed to the efficacy of tax-refusal as a weapon.

If Congress was preparing, so also was the Government. In March, 1929, it struck at organized labour and arrested thirty-six of its ablest and most militant leaders, half of whom were communists. They were charged at Meerut, in a trial that dragged on scandalously for four years, with the crime of conspiracy to "deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty" over India. They had, in fact, led some justifiable and necessary strikes. The Government was threatening the independence movement, and depriving it of its leaders, before it could strike a revolutionary blow. A little later it imposed, by ordinance, a new measure of coercion—a Public Safety Bill which the Legislative Assembly had rejected.

As the result of the British General Election in May, India's fate now depended on a Labour Government. It was, however, in a weak position, for it lacked a majority, and MacDonald's strategy was, especially in external affairs, to act only with the consent of the other two parties. He was not by temperament a fighter, and least of all was he inclined to take a risk for India. But India's hopes had been raised by a statement he made a few months before the election, at a conference of the Commonwealth Labour parties:

"I hope that within a period of months rather than years there will be a new Dominion added to the Commonwealth of our nations, a Dominion of another race, a Dominion which will find respect as an equal within the Commonwealth. I refer to India."

MacDonald was now in a position to realize his "hope," and expectations rose when Lord Irwin was called to London for prolonged consultations. On his return at the end of October, he issued a cautiously worded statement in which he foreshadowed the calling of a Round Table Conference, at which representatives of the



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Princes' States as well as British India would meet the British Government. In conclusion he said: "I am authorized on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that, in their judgment, it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion status." The concluding words registered no advance. What was new was the widening of the constitutional problem by the introduction of the States. Certainly, in the long run, a free India must include them. But to bring them in at this stage threatened complications and delays. The Left suspected that the Princes were brought in as a reactionary deadweight to balance the extremists of Congress. A hasty gathering of Indian leaders met the Working Committee of Congress in Delhi, and issued a manifesto in which they expressed their warm thanks to the Viceroy and the British Government. They hoped to be able to offer their cooperation; but to ensure the success of the coming conference they asked (1) for the adoption of a policy of conciliation; (2) for an amnesty for political prisoners; and (3) for the "predominant" representation at the Conference of Congress, the largest of Indian parties. They took the Viceroy's statement to mean that the Conference would be called "to frame a scheme of dominion constitution for India." Finally, they insisted that the public must be made to feel "even from today" that a new era had begun.

This Delhi manifesto, whoever wrote it—for it does not read like Gandhi's drafting—was a rather pathetic attempt to hope in a rather bleak environment. Wedgwood Benn was bent on making a success of the Conference, but he had to humour the Opposition. In a debate in the Commons, the Government seemed more anxious to allay the fears of the Conservatives than to justify the hopes of Indians. Gandhi wrote to an English friend that he was "dying to cooperate," but he doubted whether the Labour Party was yet ready to base its dealings with India on something other than its bayonets and forts. The younger generation could not contain its anger, and both Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, critical of the manifesto, tendered their resignation from the Working Committee. Finally, Gandhi determined to put everything to the test in an interview with the Viceroy. On 23 December, 1929, he headed what was in effect an

all-party deputation—the elder Nehru, Sapru, Jinnah and Vallabhbhai Patel. On this day, as it happened, Lord Irwin had just had a narrow escape from a terrorist's bomb which exploded under his train. The interview was friendly, but it came to a dead end when Gandhi put the decisive question: Would the Round Table Conference "proceed on the basis of full dominion status"? Lord Irwin could not give this assurance. On this negative note, therefore, the talk ended.

It may well be that the Viceroy could not have given the precise assurance Gandhi sought. But he might have said, if he had been authorized to say it, that the Government for its part would lay proposals for a dominion constitution before the Conference. But Lord Irwin knew that this was not MacDonald's intention. I had a talk with Gandhi in 1931, in which he described to me his aim at this critical moment. He did not really mean to insist on a "full" dominion constitution at once. For one thing, he knew that this was impossible, until India had an adequate army of her own; at this time she had only a negligible number of junior commissioned Indian officers. He was prepared for a transitional period, during which certain safeguards were inevitable. What mattered to him was that India and Britain should negotiate as equals.

After this fatal interview, Congress had no choice. The year's respite was expiring; it ordered its ranks for the second struggle. It met at Lahore, with Jawaharlal Nehru—in whose favour Gandhi, though elected, had withdrawn—as its president. The business before it was simple, and under Gandhi's guidance it was all but unanimous in carrying it through. Its main resolution declared that the offer to accept a dominion constitution had lapsed; its goal was now complete independence for India. It declined "in the existing circumstances" to be represented at the Round Table Conference. It called on all congressmen to resign their seats in the legislatures. Finally, it authorized the All-India Congress Committee "whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise."

At midnight on the last day of 1929, after adopting this declaration of war, Congress gathered round the flag-staff in its grounds and hoisted the ensign of Independent India.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SECOND STRUGGLE

**W**HEN IT FELL to Gandhi to lead the second struggle for India's independence in 1930, he was 61 years of age. Mind and body were in full vigour. His outlook on life had not changed since his personality reached maturity through action and reflection in South Africa. He was still the mystic who trusted in God's guidance through an Inner Voice. His faith in non-violence and in victory through suffering grew only firmer, if that were possible, as he grew older. If any change could be noted in him since he led the first struggle, it was that he was even nearer than before to the people of the villages, and a little further from the "educated Indians" of the towns. As the years went on, he became himself a villager of genius. His power lay in his ascendancy over the peasants.

Then and now, among the educated classes, there were critics and doubters. Then it was the older generation with a liberal outlook and a faith in parliamentary methods which felt itself out of sympathy with him. Now it was the young men, many of them agnostics and Socialists, who could not swallow his mysticism, his views on mechanization and the trusteeship of the rich, and his ascetic teaching about sex and prohibition. This was true even of Jawaharlal Nehru, who loved him devotedly. But Subhas Bose stood for a wholly different conception of a revolutionary struggle. He would have built up an "underground" government. He had none of Gandhi's scruples about the use of conspiratorial methods, nor any moral objections to violence. He would have tried to organize what Gandhi never contemplated—a universal refusal to pay taxes. But as in 1920, so in 1930, the critics fell into line.

In some respects the conditions under which this second struggle

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was conducted differed widely from those of 1920. One factor, but one only, was adverse. This time the Muslims, as a community, stood aloof. The worsening of their relations with the Hindus, which set in after the collapse of the Caliphate movement, had never been healed, and was not destined to be healed. Gandhi's absorption in the issue of untouchability meant that much of his teaching was addressed solely to Hindus; Muslims came to feel that the atmosphere of Congress was becoming increasingly alien to them. The bureaucracy was well aware of this drifting apart and was not slow to use the opportunity. At this time it favoured the loyalist Aga Khan, as later it favoured Jinnah. But even Shaukat Ali was now among the opponents of Congress, who joined in the general Muslim repudiation of its resort to rebellion. Speaking broadly, the Muslim community welcomed the invitation to take part in the Round Table Conference. A faithful few, however, still clung to Congress. My own impression was that in Bombay about a third of the Muslim community was on the side of Congress.

This adverse factor was more than balanced by the effects of the world-wide slump, which began in 1929. It struck India with the violence of a tropical tornado. The prices of everything the peasant produced fell catastrophically, until eventually they were halved. It is true that the prices of what he had to buy also fell, though more slowly and less heavily. But this was of no advantage to the poorer peasants, who were so stricken that they could hardly buy a yard of cloth or a pint of lamp-oil. The villages, as I saw them in the autumn and winter of 1930, were still reeling under the blow, sometimes angry, sometimes paralysed. There was no need to incite them to refuse the payment of taxes. The plain physical fact was that they could not pay their taxes, their rents or their debts. It happened that the upper ranks of the middle class also had their reasons for resentment. They suffered (as already mentioned) from the new rupee exchange and they argued that this, with other complicated devices, gave the cotton of Lancashire an advantage over their own wares. This disposed them to back Congress, and they contributed to its funds even more lavishly than in 1920. If there had been no Gandhi, the economic chaos would none the less have roused India to revolt, but its slogan in that case would not have been *ahimsa*.

Gandhiji was in no hurry to begin. His chief concern, as always, was to create the moral atmosphere of non-violence. The first step of Congress was to make the masses aware of its new stand, for independence was a novel idea, startling after generations of submission. This it did by celebrating 26 January, 1930, as Independence Day. Meetings were held not merely in every town of the Peninsula, but in villages also. At these the flag was solemnly unfurled; independence was not demanded; it was proclaimed. On the previous day, the Viceroy in a speech to the Legislature had made it clear that the Round Table Conference would be only an advisory body, which would enjoy no right of self-determination. It was a pledge, therefore, to win their own freedom by their own sufferings that Indians took on this memorable day, when they raised their hands to signify their readiness to take part in a campaign of civil disobedience, "including non-payment of taxes." It was a dignified but strongly worded resolution to which they gave their assent. "We hold it a crime against man and God," it declared, "to submit any longer to a rule" which had impoverished and unmanned the people of India. The aim of the struggle was defined with precision. "*Purna swaraj*," or "complete independence," can be interpreted to mean dominion status, provided the right of secession is assured, but this construction was ruled out by the phrase: "India must sever the British connexion."

Thus war was declared, but the battle was not yet joined. In the interval Gandhi published a manifesto designed to give to various classes of the community a concrete idea of what *swaraj* would mean. This was a programme condensed into eleven points:

- (1) Total prohibition. (2) Reduction of exchange ratio to 1s. 4d. (3) Reduction of Land Revenue by fifty per cent. (4) Abolition of the salt tax. (5) Reduction of military expenditure by fifty per cent to begin with. (6) Reduction of salaries of the highest-grade services by half. (7) Protective tariff on foreign cloth. (8) Passage of the Coastal Traffic Reservation Bill. (9) Discharge of all political prisoners save those condemned for murder. (10) Abolition of the C.I.D. (11) Issue of licences to use firearms for self-defence.

This list of reforms is deeply interesting, both as a psychological

and a political document. Only the Mahatma would have included prohibition and put it first. Three points (2, 7 and 8) were designed to win the merchants and industrialists. Two points (3 and 4) were addressed especially to the peasants. How wise Gandhi was to do this I realized during the visit to a poor village in the United Provinces. One of the peasants in the half-starved group around me used the word *swaraj*. "Why do you want *swaraj*?" I bluntly asked. The answer came instantly from several thin throats at once: "Because it will halve the land tax." The last point on the list, the right to possess arms, is a reminder of the deep wound our armed conquest inflicted on India's self-respect. For the rest, the list reflects the diagnosis of Indian poverty current among nationalists in the nineteenth century—an extravagant government and high taxation. It was not usual in those days to attack the landlord or the usurer, nor to demand stiffer taxation of super-incomes. The list includes no constructive measures to raise production, nor does it mention education or health. For its purpose it was well designed. What was dubious about it (as Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out) was the dramatic appeal to the Viceroy to carry out these reforms.

Gandhiji's intuition had told him to start the struggle by direct action against the salt tax. I used to think, as all Europeans and many "educated Indians" did, that this was one of his fads, until I saw the response of the villages to his challenge. The salt tax aroused violent indignation out of all proportion to its apparent lightness. Oddly enough, the same thing happened in France, where the salt *gabelle* helped to bring down the *ancien régime*. Yet salt has in the Indian climate an importance it cannot have in Europe, for in copious sweating the blood loses salts which must be replaced by a high consumption of the taxed article. It is, moreover, almost the only relish which the poor villager can afford to add to his monotonous diet. He needs it also for his cattle. The tax was, by our notions, light; by Gandhi's reckoning (which may have been too high) it amounted to nine annas per head of the population per annum. But the poorer labourer might earn only three annas a day (slightly more than 3d.), and he might have four or five mouths to feed. The tax, then, for the poorer strata of the population, could absorb the earnings of a fortnight's work in the year. It was then a bad tax, as most indirect taxes

are. Apart from this, the peasant resented it, because he looked on salt as a gift of nature—he could make it, as it was made from time immemorial, in stone pans from sea water by the sun's heat. The salt tax had, moreover, an ugly history. It had always been exacted by the Moghuls and other foreign conquerors. In later days salt was brought as ballast from Cheshire in British ships, because many came out nearly empty and went home heavily laden. Thus it came to typify the tribute India paid in a surplus of exports over imports. Gandhi knew what he was doing when he began his revolt by attacking this detested tax.

Gandhi was resolved that he would himself perform the first act of civil disobedience by a symbolic breach of the laws dealing with salt. Only those who believed in non-violence as an article of faith should take the first step. As usual, in a letter to the Viceroy, dated 2 March, 1930, he announced his intention. In it he dwelt in a moving argument on the poverty of the masses, and drove home his appeal for the abolition of the tax by criticizing the scale of the Viceroy's official salary, five thousand times the income of the average Indian. Meanwhile, he had been schooling selected members of the Sabar-mati *ashram* in the state of mind proper to an act of *satyagraha*. They must harbour no hate in their hearts. On 12 March, seventy-nine of them set out to cover the distance of two hundred miles that lay between Ahmedabad and the sea shore at Dandi. A crowd, said to number seventy-five thousand persons, wished them God-speed, and all along the route the villagers gathered in their thousands. Gandhi preached on all his familiar themes, and at sunrise and sunset he conducted his daily prayer meetings under the open skies. The march occupied twenty-four days, and throughout them the Press of India and, indeed, of Europe and America was filled with descriptions of this singular ceremony of rebellion. Arrests of the Congress leaders had meanwhile begun. In Gujerat no less than 390 village headmen threw up their jobs. The pitch of emotion was rising, and with it the readiness for sacrifice. On 6 April, after a night of fasting and prayer, the leader and his followers bathed in the sea at Dandi. Thereafter Gandhi bent down and picked up a handful of untaxed salt. That was all. After committing this crime, he expected his instant arrest.

For this signal the Indian masses had been waiting. Everywhere

## THE SECOND STRUGGLE

within reach of the sea peasants and fishermen broke the law by making natural salt. Many were arrested and, as their manner is, the police used their *lathis* freely. Vast meetings were held in every town to inaugurate civil disobedience. The Government started its measures of coercion by imprisoning Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of Congress for the year, and Gandhi took his place. Scores of members resigned from the Legislatures. Repressive ordinances followed each other in quick succession.

Gandhiji now sensed that the time had come for graver acts of rebellion. In a letter to the Viceroy he announced his intention of raiding two of the salt depots of Gujerat. After this challenge, in the small hours of the morning of 4 May, Gandhi was arrested in his bed by a posse of armed police and taken to his old quarters in Yeravda Prison. This time he occupied himself by translating into English some of the hymns of the Hindu scriptures.

Gandhi's arrest was the signal for a complete *hartal* all over India. In Bombay even the cotton mills and the railway workshops stood still. In the big textile town of Sholapur there was serious violence; six police stations were burned down and several policemen murdered. Thereafter, for a week, the organized workers kept order. In the end twenty-five of them were shot dead, and a hundred wounded. There was firing also in Calcutta.

The raid which Gandhi had planned on the salt-pans at Dhar-sana was now carried out by 2,500 volunteers, led by his second son, Manilal. Before they advanced, Mrs. Naidu led them in prayer and appealed to them to be true to Gandhiji's inspiration and abstain from violence. "You will be beaten, but you must not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows." Round the depot a barrier of barbed wire had been erected and a ditch dug. As the first picked column of the volunteers went forward, police officers ordered them to disperse; they still advanced in silence. Suddenly scores of police fell upon them and rained blows on their heads.<sup>1</sup> Not one man so much as raised his arm to fend off the blows. Soon the ground was carpeted with the prostrate bodies of men writhing in pain, with

<sup>1</sup> I am summarizing the graphic description of an eye-witness, Webb Miller, an American journalist, which I have borrowed from Mr. Roy Walker's *Sword of Gold*, one of the most readable of the many books about Gandhi.



fractured skulls or broken shoulders, their white clothes stained with blood. Then a second column advanced, without wavering, knowing well what awaited it. There was no struggle; the volunteers simply marched forward until they, too, were struck down. Now the tactics were varied. Groups of twenty-five men advanced, sat down and waited. As they sat, the enraged police fell upon them, beat them on the head and kicked them in the abdomen or the testicles. Some were dragged along the ground and thrown into the ditches. Hour after hour this went on, while stretcher-bearers removed the inert, bleeding bodies. Over three hundred casualties were taken to hospital with fractured skulls and other serious injuries; two died. Mrs. Naidu and Manilal Gandhi were arrested.

This was only one of several of these non-violent battles. Some of these raids succeeded, and large quantities of salt were removed. There were graver happenings at Peshawar in July. Here some hot-blooded violence occurred at the start. The police abandoned the town to the Red Shirts, who observed perfect non-violent discipline when the troops re-occupied the town three days later and mowed them down with machine-guns. During these events in the Frontier Province a platoon of the Garhwal Regiment, all of them Hindus, refused to fire on their Muslim fellow-countrymen. At the little town of Barisal a significant incident happened. The police had injured hundreds of persons in *lathi* charges in one day. The infuriated townsmen then locked up the police in the local school and set fire to it. Two Congress Volunteers broke the door open and rescued them from the burning building. The lesson of Chauri Chaura had been learned.

Some weeks before these latter events the Working Committee of Congress, meeting at Allahabad in May, extended the scope of civil disobedience in many directions. The boycott of foreign cloth took the first place in its plan of campaign. The picketing of toddy shops came next. The forest laws were systematically disobeyed. A boycott of British banks, shipping and insurance companies was organized. These instructions were generally obeyed and led to heavy losses of revenue. In many regions the local administration was disorganized by the resignation of headmen. Everywhere Congress aimed at some public demonstration once a week. Frequently these demonstrations

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were broken up by *lathi* charges. The police had been trained to strike with this formidable weapon at vital parts of the body. Finally, the refusal to pay land tax was started in many *ryotwari* districts (i.e. those where the peasants own their fields), first in Bardoli (Gujarat) and then in several districts of the Madras Presidency. It was not till the end of this year (1930) that a no-rent strike started in any of the *zamidari* districts (i.e. those where the landlord collects the tax with his rent), and then only round Allahabad. Jawaharlal Nehru was certainly right when he argued that a refusal to pay land tax in any form could have been organized all over India at this time with immense effect,<sup>1</sup> but the propertied element in Congress was against it. By June India was in full revolt, and a bitter social boycott cut off the loyalist minority from the Nationalist masses.

Lord Irwin did his duty as Viceroy in presiding over these measures of repression, but no one could doubt that he did it with extreme distaste. The bureaucracy and the British commercial community were for much more ruthless measures. At home MacDonald and Wedgwood Benn, who tried to do his best for India, were eager for peace, if they could secure it without the risk of a political crisis. They wanted to make a success of the Round Table Conference and they knew very well that without Gandhi and Congress it would be only an empty ceremony. The result was that when an opening for negotiations presented itself, they did much, but not enough, to make use of it. George Slocombe, the correspondent of the Labour Party's official organ, the *Daily Herald*, who had been following the struggle with great distress, was allowed to interview Gandhi in gaol. Anxious as he was to pave the way towards peace, he drew from the prisoner a statement which he thought hopeful. Gandhi told him that he would recommend the suspension of civil disobedience and participation in the Round Table Conference, provided (1) that the terms of reference of the Conference included the framing of a constitution giving India the substance of independence; (2) that the salt tax be repealed, prohibition carried and a ban on foreign cloth imposed; (3) that an amnesty for political prisoners be granted; and (4) that the other items of his eleven points be discussed at a later stage. There was no sign of yielding here. None the less, the two leading

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 232.

Indian Liberals, Sir T. B. Saprú and Mr. Jayakar, always optimists and men of peace, persuaded the Viceroy to allow them to confer with the Congress leaders.

There now happened one of the oddest proceedings in the history of political warfare. The two Nehrus, father and son, were carried, with every courtesy, by special train from their northern prison to Poona. There in Yeravda jail they conferred for three days with Gandhi, Patel, Mrs. Naidu and other members of the Working Committee, while Saprú and Jayakar did their genial and skilful best to bring about a compromise. Nothing came of it. The unanimous conclusions of Gandhi and his colleagues were stated in a letter, dated 15 August, 1930. "We have come to the conclusion," they wrote, "that the time is not yet ripe for securing a settlement honourable for our country. Marvellous as has been the mass awakening during the past five months . . . we feel that the sufferings have been neither sustained enough nor large enough for the immediate attainment of the end." Gladly though they would welcome a settlement, they saw no sign of it on the horizon. This able document went on to define the demands of Congress, much as Gandhi had done in his statement to Slocombe, but more fully and precisely. It stressed the right of India to secede from the Empire. It insisted that any adjustments during the transitional period of the transfer of power must be decided by India's representatives. It stipulated that such British claims as Indians might think unjust (notably, part of the public debt) should be referred to an independent tribunal. This was a way of saying with dignity that the struggle must go on.

In what spirit and with what success the struggle was waged, I saw myself during the latter half of this year. Bombay had two governments. To the British Government there still were loyal the European population, the Indian sepoys who wore its uniform and the elder generation of the Muslim minority. The rest of Bombay had transferred its allegiance to one of His Majesty's too numerous prisoners. In Mahatma Gandhi's name Congress ruled this city. Its lightest nod was obeyed. It could fill the streets, when it pleased and as often as it pleased, with tens of thousands of men and women, who shouted its watchwords. It could, with a word, close the shutters of every shop in the bazaar. When it proclaimed a *hartal*, which it

did almost every week by way of protest against some act of the other Government, silence descended on the streets and even factories closed their doors. Only with its printed permit on a scrap of coloured paper dare a driver urge his bullocks and his bales past its uniformed sentries, whose duty it was to keep watch, day and night, in every lane and alley of the city, lest any cart should carry the forbidden cloth or yarn of Lancashire. They had their guard rooms. Their inspectors entered every warehouse and shop and watched every cotton press. They would even confiscate imported goods which a merchant had tried to smuggle past their patrols.

Every day began with its public ritual. At dawn from every street there issued a little procession of white-clad figures. All wore the homespun *khadi*. The men had on their heads the white Gandhi cap. A few had drums or triangles; all sang. For the educated few this movement had its books and pamphlets in English, but the unlettered mass knew by heart its rhymed songs and ballads, which extolled its leader, called for a boycott of British goods and proclaimed its vow to win *swaraj* or die. You could not escape them; you could not forget them.

As the day wore on, even in the European streets one noticed that in ones and twos Indian women were seating themselves on chairs at the doors of certain shops. They all wore the graceful Indian dress, but their *sari* (the long draped garment) was of orange, a colour that has in this land its heroic associations. Few entered these shops. You might catch a glimpse of the idle owners reading or playing chess. But if anyone did attempt to enter, the lady joined her hands in supplication; she pleaded, she reasoned, and if all else failed she would throw herself across the threshold and dare him to walk over her body. But these were the exceptional shops which had refused to give the pledge to sell no foreign cloth and no British goods. The pickets went in their hundreds to prison, but always there were more to take their place. It was in this readiness to suffer that the moral power of this movement resided. It reminded me in its temper and outlook of the militant suffrage movement in England. A disarmed people had instinctively adopted these tactics. It courted suffering, and faced it, as women will, with a noble, if passive, courage. Women were the natural exponents of its gospel. Out of the seclusion of

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centuries they stepped at the call of patriotism, and nothing in this astonishing movement was so surprising as their joyful devotion. If they had not yet won *swaraj* for India, they had completed the emancipation of their own sex. Even in the backward North, with its tradition of *purdah*, one could hear the ripping of veils and the tearing of curtains.

Congress had an instinct for colour and display. The struggle was not all suffering. Its flags were everywhere and its colours were on every car. When the Government locked Gandhi up it made him omnipresent. His photograph smiled from every shop. The Congress Volunteers marched in military formation in its processions. With the Indian tricolour flag, the orange dresses of the women's contingents and the white homespun of the men, they made a bright pageant in the dazzling light. After the procession would come the mass demonstration, which in Bombay would often gather, in the park by the seashore, as many as twenty thousand people. More sober and orderly meetings I never saw. No Western gathering was ever so silent and passive as these Indian crowds. Few stood; they squatted on the ground, the women in one wing, the men in another, and so, motionless and silent, in regular files, they listened to speeches and songs. The speeches were certainly what lawyers call "seditious," but invariably they preached non-violence. Sedition comes near to orthodoxy when a hundred million of one's fellows agree with every word. While the speakers talked, the more devoted members of the audience, men as well as women, would take out the little spindle, the *takli*, and twist it placidly and indefatigably as they listened.

What was happening, meanwhile, in the neighbouring villages almost surpassed belief. The land in Gujerat is fertile and will grow under irrigation good cotton, tobacco and sugar, as well as cereals. Though the holdings, which the peasants own as independent yeomen, range only from ten to twenty acres, I was startled by evidences of relative prosperity. Instead of the squalid mud huts usual in other provinces, here were villages of brick houses, often of two storeys, with their doorposts elaborately carved, while the outer walls were decorated with naïve and amusing paintings. Their stately and beautiful cattle are the pride of these farmers.

These villagers had taken a pledge to refuse payment of their

land tax. The Nationalist movement was here at its height. The Indian Government was here at its worst, struggling, as it was bound to do, to collect the taxes which the peasants refused, and its Indian subordinates were using or tolerating in the process a physical brutality and a contempt for the forms of law which I should have refused to credit without the evidence of my senses. The tax, to begin with, was demanded three months before it was due. The peasants who refused to pay were usually beaten. The next step was to seize and sell their cattle or other belongings. Land worth from Rs.700 to Rs.1,000 per *bigha* ( $1\frac{3}{4}$  acres) was offered for sale at one or two rupees. Literally these peasants risked their all. When extortion failed, terrorism was tried. I saw at Borsad the cage with bars—exactly like a wild beast's cage at the zoo—measuring thirty feet square, in which eighteen political prisoners, as yet unconvicted, were kept day and night, without work or books.<sup>1</sup>

Many villages were totally abandoned. In the silent street nothing moved till a monkey skipped from roof to roof across the lane of blinding sunlight. Here and there one met a peasant who had returned for the day to plough his fields, or a priest who guarded his temple. For the rest, the people in their thousands had moved across the frontier of British India into the territory of Baroda. There, close to the boundary, with their beloved cattle, they camped in shelters of matting and palm leaves, the ground cumbered with their chests and their beds, their churns, their ploughs and the great clay-coated baskets that hold their grain. In some of these shelters there hung pictures of the gods, and everywhere, at intervals, the presiding genius of this camp, a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi. I asked a group of these villagers why they faced these hardships and losses. The women, as usual, answered first and voiced their feeling of personal loyalty to their leaders. "We'll pay no taxes," they said, "till Mahatmaji and Vallabhbhai tell us to pay." Then the men, slowly collecting their thoughts, voiced their economic grievance: "We won't pay because the tax is unjust," and they went on to explain that at the prevailing prices they made, as owner-cultivators, less than a day-labourer's wage. Finally they added: "We're doing it to win *swaraj*."

<sup>1</sup> For the evidence see my *Rebel India* (1931), Chap. II.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE TRUCE AND THE CONFERENCE

**I**N LONDON the first session of the Round Table Conference had come to an end, and the outline of the new constitution was already discernible. In his closing speech MacDonald expressed the hope that Congress would be represented at the next session. On this hint the Viceroy acted promptly. He unconditionally released Gandhi and all members of the Working Committee. They left their prisons on 26 January, 1931, the anniversary of Independence Day. This gesture of conciliation was performed with grace, and the statement issued by Lord Irwin was a frank invitation to peace. The Working Committee met at once at Allahabad, the home of Motilal Nehru. This veteran, as much beloved as he was revered, was mortally ill and died within a few days of his last reunion with Gandhi and his colleagues, who followed him to his funeral pyre beside the Ganges with mingled pride and grief. It was obvious to the Committee, after it had consulted the three friendly Liberals, Sapru, Jayakar and Sastri, who had returned from the London Conference, that the natural sequel to the overtures from the Government would be the negotiation of a truce. Things could not go on as they were, for the repression continued. Gandhi wrote, therefore, to Lord Irwin proposing a heart-to-heart talk, and moved to Delhi with his colleagues. The Viceroy was as courteous and friendly as any man could be, but his position was not easy. The bureaucrats round him would have preferred to crush Congress, while at home Churchill was doing his best to rouse the Tories and intimidate the weak Labour Government. "It is alarming and also nauseating," he said, "to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace, while he is still organizing and

conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor."

In these difficult conditions the talks dragged on with eight meetings spread over three weeks. But Gandhi was as hopeful as he was persistent, and the Viceroy felt for him a regard and respect to which he afterwards gave public expression. The Delhi Treaty, as the Irwin-Gandhi agreement was often called, was signed on 5 March, 1931. Some of the difficulties were verbal. Should civil disobedience be "ended" or "suspended"? Eventually it was "discontinued." Others were more substantial. Gandhi tried to secure a public enquiry into the conduct of the police. In this he failed; the first rule of the Government of India was always to protect its subordinates. Gandhi secured two substantial concessions. The making of salt, not for sale but for the peasants' own use, was permitted. So also was the picketing, provided it was peaceful and "unaggressive," of liquor shops and shops dealing in non-Indian goods. Non-violent prisoners were to be released and confiscated property returned. The Working Committee was reluctant to accept the Delhi Treaty, until it realized that civil disobedience could not be revived if Gandhi were opposed to this course. Its hesitation was due chiefly to the vaguely drafted political clause, which implied acceptance of the constitutional scheme emerging from the Round Table Conference:

"Of the scheme there outlined, federation is an essential part; so also are Indian responsibility and reservations or safeguards, in the interests of India, for such matters as, for instance, defence; external affairs; the position of minorities; the financial credit of India and the discharge of obligations."

Jawaharlal Nehru has recorded in his *Autobiography* (p. 357) the "tremendous shock" which this clause gave him. It threw overboard not only the resolutions of the Lahore Congress over which he had presided, but also the declaration adopted at thousands of meetings on Independence Day. With that these "safeguards" were irreconcilable. Nehru believed that the little Liberal Party valued dominion status and the retention of a British garrison as a guarantee for the propertied interests. Gandhi argued that he had secured everything necessary for "the substance of independence" by the insertion of the qualifying phrase "in the interests of India." This Nehru rejected as



a delusive subtlety. It is, I think, rather doubtful whether Gandhi ever was firmly convinced of the wisdom of breaking the British connexion; if he was, the change came later. This surrender of his, as Nehru saw it, left in the heart of the younger man "a great emptiness, as of something precious gone, almost beyond recall."

In 1939, in an interview with Steel of the *New York Times* (reproduced in *Harijan*, 24 June), Gandhi defined "independence" as "the complete withdrawal of British power from India." Dominion status, he added, would satisfy him, though he disliked the word "dominion." In a talk with me at Poona in February, 1946, he said that it was Andrews who converted him to a more radical view of the meaning of independence, by stressing the significance of the royal titles. Over the Dominions, His Majesty is King only; over India he is King-Emperor. In other words, it was from the Empire and all its associations that Gandhi wished to be freed; with the Commonwealth he could come to terms. Happily the imperial title has now been dropped. On the right of secession for India Gandhi always insisted.

Congress met for its annual session at Karachi, under Vallabhbhai Patel's presidency, in an angry and unhappy mood. Gandhi was met on his arrival by young men drawn from the Left Wing, who greeted him with black flags. On the previous day the terrorist Bhagat Singh had been hanged in spite of Gandhi's efforts to save his life. He was regarded by the Hindu masses as a national hero, and a widespread *hartal* was observed in his honour. Congress, which passed a resolution condemning the execution "as an act of wanton vengeance" and exalting his bravery, was with difficulty persuaded to insert a phrase "disapproving of political violence in any shape or form." Its distress was aggravated by an outbreak of Hindu-Muslim riots; at Kanpur, 166 persons were killed. After heated debates, the Delhi Treaty was approved in a resolution which, in effect, turned the second clause upside down. It reaffirmed the goal of *purna swaraj* (complete independence) and claimed for the Indian nation "control over the defence forces, external affairs, finance, fiscal and economic policy," called for a scrutiny by an impartial tribunal of India's financial obligations, and asserted "the right of either party to end the partnership at will." It then appointed Gandhi to represent it at

the Conference with any others the Working Committee might select.

At this session of Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru achieved a notable success with the adoption of a charter of fundamental rights, which gave a picture more adequate than Gandhi's eleven points of what *swaraj* should mean. It began with an enumeration of civil liberties, so drafted as to assure equal rights to the "Untouchables." Universal adult suffrage and free and compulsory education were promised. The State should be secular, i.e. "neutral" towards all religions. Labour was promised a living wage, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment, the end of serfdom, and the right of combination for peasants and workers. The reform of land tenure and revenue, and relief for the small peasant, were promised on fairly radical lines, though the clause stopped short of the dispossession of landlords. Death duties, a graded tax on incomes arising from land, and the control of usury were mentioned. A last clause foreshadowed the training in arms of a national militia. Gandhi's points were also included.

Lord Irwin's term of office was now at an end. The new Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, a representative of the governing class of a much more conventional type, made it clear from the first that he desired no close relationship with Gandhi, and the political atmosphere deteriorated quickly. The leaders of Congress were far from supposing that they had won a notable victory. But the rank and file, as they garlanded the released prisoners on their return to their homes and stationed their "peaceful" pickets without fear of arrest, enjoyed a moment of elation. The prisoners, in the course of this year of struggle, numbered in round figures 100,000, of whom 12,000 were Muslims. Officials and the police were soon stung into an answering hostility. As the months went by, there were complaints from both sides that the Delhi Treaty was being broken in all its clauses. Gandhi drew up a formidable list of these breaches. A long and unsatisfactory correspondence followed and Gandhi, using the only effective means of pressure he possessed, withdrew his acceptance of the invitation to the Round Table Conference and cancelled his passage. Finally, in a talk at the last moment at Simla, a far from satisfactory arrangement was reached, which did at least prolong the

truce. All that Gandhi could secure was an official enquiry into his charges relating to the harsh collection of land revenue at Bardoli. After this agreement, Gandhi, with only two fellow-delegates, Pandit Malaviya and Mrs. Naidu, caught the last possible boat for London by chartering a special train. Though the Government would have allowed Congress to send fifteen or twenty delegates, the Working Committee preferred to make Gandhi solely responsible for the presentation of its case. Enormous crowds cheered him as he embarked, garlanded with flowers and escorted by Volunteers, but he went on his difficult mission with foreboding. He tried to be hopeful, but in vain. "When I think," he wrote, "of the prospects in London . . . there is nothing wanting to fill me with utter despair. . . . There is every chance of my returning empty-handed."

What, then, had Indians won by this year of non-violent revolt? My own impression, as I went about among them, was clear and decided. They had freed their own minds. They had won independence in their hearts. Gandhi had awakened this gentle and passive nation from the slumber of centuries. It acquiesced no longer in the Conquest. A lasting change had happened in the minds of the hundred thousand who went to prison and the millions who faced the *lathis* of the police. It was enough to perform even a symbolic act of rebellion by making salt, or to picket a cloth shop, as thousands of shy and sheltered women did. By these acts they broke the paralysis, the consciousness of a predestined inferiority, that had oppressed them from their childhood. They shed their servility and thought henceforward as free men. This was true of the vast majority, who accepted non-violence only as a tactic; the few who practised it as a faith won something more, a marvellous self-control. Gandhi's originality lay above all in this: that he realized that independence is something other and more than a condition that can be defined in legal terms. It must have an economic meaning. Of this the spinning wheel was for him the symbol, though others might have chosen the blast furnace. But above all, independence was for him a state of mind. In this year of revolt he endowed Indians with the courage to be free.

To estimate the effect of non-violent resistance on others is more difficult. The first effect on the officials and policemen employed to

suppress it was to brutalize them. Jawaharlal Nehru noticed the look of hatred in the faces of the police who beat him with their *lathis*. I detected it in talking even to high officials. They were not "converted" by the innocence of "soul-force"; on the contrary, it angered them more than violence would have done, probably because they were at bottom ashamed of their own behaviour. The effect at a distance was slight, and it worked slowly. If the British public could have witnessed, even in a film, the scenes that went on in these *lathi* charges, it would have been deeply disturbed. But films were banned and few newspapers printed adequate descriptive accounts. The Americans, however, were better informed and at this time and later the pressure of their disapproval was acutely felt by successive British Governments. In the long run, what did influence the more thoughtful part of the British nation was the painful spectacle of the imprisonment, again and again, year after year, of the best-loved leaders of the Indian people. Parliament and the electorate would face this unpleasant spectacle and endure the world's reproach, once and twice and yet again. But at length the resolution was formed to make an end of coercion. The process was slow, and the offers which reflected our uneasiness were for many years grudging and half-hearted. At long last Gandhi's faith was justified.

On board the *Rajputana*, Gandhi sailed on 27 August, 1931, for Europe. He travelled second class and kept up during the voyage his routine of early rising, spinning and prayer-meetings. At Aden the Indian residents presented him with a purse of 328 guineas. At Port Said a deputation from the Wafd, the Egyptian Nationalist Party, which wished to welcome him, was forbidden by the British. At Marseilles he addressed a meeting of French students, who welcomed him to Europe. In London, on his arrival, he addressed a meeting at Friends' House. Then and throughout his stay he wore his usual costume, a shawl of homespun draped round his spare person, *dhoti* and sandals. He spoke sitting, without gestures or self-conscious phrases, but it was obvious that he had won his audience by his transparent sincerity.

He chose to stay with Miss Muriel Lester at Kingsley Hall, her settlement in Bow. It was far from St. James's Palace, where the Conference met, but he was determined to live among the poorest of the

poor. There, in a little cell on the flat roof, he led his usual ascetic life, starting the day with a walk through the mean streets. He was soon at home among the workers, talking and joking with them and visiting some of them in their homes. The children loved him and gave him on his birthday a gift of toys, which he cherished and took back to India. He shared not only in the religious life of the settlement, but also in its recreations. I remember pleading with him not to give all his attention to the East End; it was important that he should use his opportunities to win the sympathy of the intellectuals and the governing class also. "No," he answered, "if I can win the workers, the impression I make on them will percolate upwards." For him the happiest part of his stay was the week-end he spent among the textile operatives of Lancashire. He knew that his boycott of cotton cloth had aggravated the crisis of unemployment through which they were passing, and he was bent on explaining why he had started it. He tried to convey to them some idea of India's poverty and the wrong done to her in the past by the deliberate ruin of her industries. The workers received him with courtesy and in the end he won their affection.

After all, Gandhi did not limit himself to Bow. He spoke to the boys at Eton, and to meetings of undergraduates at Oxford, Cambridge and the London School of Economics. Twice he addressed Members of Parliament in committee rooms at the House. I recall one evening, when he sat for hours at a gathering of authors and journalists, and answered our questions with quick-witted sympathy, never trying to score a debating point and never evading a difficulty. He gave a long broadcast talk to America. Winston Churchill refused to see him, but he met many notable men, ranging from Lloyd George, Bernard Shaw and Charlie Chaplin to the King. He in his turn learned something. Once he came late to an appointment he had given me, the rarest of happenings with him. He was excited and excused himself, because he had come from a revealing talk with Sir Samuel Hoare (now Lord Templewood), whom he liked and respected for his honesty. Hitherto, Gandhi told me, he never had believed that Englishmen were sincere when they maintained that British rule has been, on the whole, a benefit to India; he had supposed that this was consciously dishonest propaganda. Sir Samuel

convinced him that he and his fellow-countrymen held this belief sincerely. This talk was for Gandhi a memorable event. To a reception at Buckingham Palace he went in his usual costume. Someone asked him if he was sufficiently dressed for his talk with the King-Emperor. "The King," he answered, "had enough on for both of us." What he achieved through these personal contacts, by spreading some understanding of India's case, was more valuable than his work at the Conference. There all the odds were against him. Its doings were overshadowed by the financial crisis. He was only one delegate among many, and though his unique personality made its impression, there were few who understood that it was he, and not the glittering Princes or the able Liberal lawyers, who spoke for India's millions.

The delegates at this Conference were chosen, not by Indians, but by the Viceroy and his officials. What they did was to catalogue with scrupulous care every creed, every party, every racial minority, every interest in the Peninsula. In St. James's Palace were assembled Princes and Untouchables, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Parsies and Hindus, spokesmen of landowners, Chambers of Commerce and Trade Unions, but Mother India was not there. From this nation of peasants not a single peasant nor any representative of the peasantry took his seat. The delegates entered as Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, and Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus they remained to the end. From such a conference no Indian idea and no majority that reflected the national will could possibly emerge.

What Gandhi found when the Conference got to work in earnest was that its attention was concentrated on the problem of the minorities, before the central issue, the transfer of power, was decided. This

It was often argued that if he had conceded separate communal electorates for these two minorities he might have won their support for a genuine scheme of *swaraj*. Certainly he was unyielding, but so were the Muslims; even his old ally, Shaukat Ali, was absorbed in the pursuit of communal interests. What happened, after Gandhi's failure, was that all the special interests came together, under the leadership of Sir Hubert Carr, one of the delegates representing the British commercial community, and presented to the Conference an agreed document in which these groups supported each other in demanding separate electorates, not only for Muslims and Sikhs, but for Christians, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and the Untouchables as well, with special representation for big landowners, Chambers of Commerce and Trade Unions.

In two speeches Gandhi had to report "with shame" his failure to find an agreed solution. Confronted with the imposing numbers against him, he had to remind the Conference that Congress was a great power. His claim that it represented 85 per cent of the Indian population was an exaggeration, but it came nearer to the true facts than the official world realized. He argued that the scheme of the minorities would vivisect the nation; no national and responsible government could grow out of it. Dr. Ambedkar's claim to a separate electorate for the Untouchables stirred him to the depths. He refused to classify them as a separate class; this would subject them to a "perpetual bar sinister." He claimed that in any vote of the Untouchables he would "top the poll." He ended with the declaration on which he acted in the following year: "If I was the only person to resist this thing, I would resist it with my life." For the rest, Gandhi advocated a system of indirect election for both the central and provincial legislatures, in which the village would be the basic unit—in effect the Soviet system in its original form.

In retrospect, the most interesting of Gandhi's speeches was on defence. "I still aspire," he declared, "to be a citizen, not of the Empire, but of a Commonwealth." But it must be a free and equal partnership. "A nation that has no control over her own defence forces and over external affairs is hardly a responsible nation." "The army," he demanded, "should pass under our control in its entirety." But he saw the difficulty. The army in India has been



(TOP) *The Mahatma  
leaving No. 10, Downing  
Street, 1931*



(BOTTOM) *Gandhi dictat-  
ing a Congress resolution  
during the session at  
Allahabad*





built up not merely to repel foreign aggression, but primarily to suppress rebellion against British authority. But at present the Indian troops are "foreigners to me. . . . I cannot speak to them. . . . There is an absolute wall between them and us." The result, he went on to confess, was that if power were to be handed over now, "the army will not accept my command"—neither its British Commander, nor the Rajputs, nor the Sikhs. None the less, he cherished a dream. "I expect to exercise that command with the goodwill of the British people. They will be there at the time of transferring the command, to teach a new lesson to these very soldiers, and to tell them that they are, after all, serving their own countrymen"—which is exactly what Sir Claude Auchinleck did, fifteen years later.

How moderate Gandhiji was this speech reveals; for he went on to anticipate that British troops would remain in India after the transfer of power, albeit under the control of an Indian Government. But he knew very well that the British ruling class was not yet ready for such a surrender of power. The outlook for India had worsened after MacDonald broke up the Labour Government. His dream was only a dream. "Seeing the atmosphere here, I know that I cannot infect British statesmen or the British public with the idea." It cannot be done, he realized, until Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs think of themselves as Indians, and learn to trust one another. He said in this speech that he was prepared to frame safeguards for the interim period, if this were done in India's interests. But he gave no details. It was his strength that always, in every relationship, he saw the ethical principles which should govern it, but he descended with some reluctance to details.

Gandhiji had already made up his mind about the constitution which was emerging from the Conference. He found it wholly unacceptable. The period of transition, after which the Federation would evolve into a fully self-governing Dominion, was not limited in time. The Indianization of the Army, on which this development largely depended, was proceeding at an almost imperceptible pace. The class strategy that inspired the whole scheme was only too obvious. Sir Samuel Hoare relied on the Princes and the Muslims to hold the masses and the Hindu intelligentsia in check. As he afterwards told the Commons, "it will be impossible, short of a landslide,

for the extremists"—by which he meant the Congress—"to get control of the Centre." Gandhi never wholly rid himself of a sentimental attachment to the Princes, but he described them, in one of his talks with me, as "British officers in Indian dress." The population of their States numbered only a quarter of all India; yet they would control two-fifths of the seats in the Federal Council with their nominated representatives. In the Assembly, the Muslims, relatively to the caste-Hindus, would be over-represented in a ratio of two to one. The franchise was to be conferred only on ten per cent of the adult males. To make assurance doubly sure, the Army and foreign policy, under Ministers responsible only to the Viceroy, were to be "reserved subjects." The Viceroy, with a veto over all legislation, was charged with the special duty of protecting the minorities—a formula that suggested a good deal of interference. Gandhi said, too, that the Finance Minister, though nominally responsible to the Legislature; would control only twenty per cent of the expenditure for which he had to budget. "You tell me"—so Gandhi summed up his impressions for me—"that I am to be master in my own house, but you keep the key of the safe, and you station a sentry at the door."

This part of the scheme, embodied in the Act of 1935, remained a dead letter. It was not only Congress that rejected it; the Muslim League would have nothing to do with it, and even the Princes found it in the end "unacceptable." The other part of the scheme, which conceded responsible government to the provinces, was open to many objections. In my talks with Gandhi I found him hardly more willing to admit its value than he was to give the Federal constitution a trial. As time went on, he revised his first impressions and decided to make full use of the new provincial councils.

In his concluding speeches Gandhiji struck a note of warning. He felt that after so many "weary weeks" the Conference had accomplished exactly nothing. The proposed safeguards, especially the cramping financial safeguards, were not in the interests of India. He did not want to break the bond between Britain and India, but he did want to transform it. "I want to transform that slavery into complete freedom for my country." But he feared that the slender thread of cooperation was about to snap, and that he would have to deliver once again his message of civil resistance to the millions of India, in

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spite of the aircraft and the tanks. "They will have no result. . . . We teach our children to dance with joy when the bullets are flying round them like so many crackers." But he did not want to "take the plunge"; he was still eager to find a compromise. He ended on a happier note. He expressed his thanks to all, from their Majesties down to the operatives in Lancashire, who had treated him as one of themselves. "All this hospitality, all this kindness, will never be effaced from my memory, no matter what befalls my unhappy land."

In Paris on the way home, on 5 December, Gandhi addressed a great meeting. In Switzerland he met his biographer, Romain Rolland, for the first time in the flesh. In Italy he enjoyed the only holiday he had had for years. He met Mussolini—a privilege which Nehru, a few years later, declined. The Pope would not receive him. In the Sistine Chapel he stood for several minutes before the Crucifix and murmured to Mahadev Desai: "One can't help being moved to tears."

The last event of Gandhi's stay in Europe was ominous. An agency reporter in Rome published an interview with him, in which he was made not only to say that he was about to restart civil disobedience, but to dwell with offensive malice on the injury he would inflict on the British people. The thing was an impudent fabrication; he had given no interview whatever in Rome. Published after he had sailed from Brindisi, he could not contradict it adequately until he reached Aden. It had then done irreparable harm. The fact was that, though he feared he might have to resume civil disobedience, he had not yet made up his mind.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE HARIJANS

**B**OMBAY STAGED a magnificent welcome for Gandhiji when he landed on 28 December, 1931. On the boat he had written a surprisingly cheerful account of the Round Table Conference, from which he was "returning . . . with hope enriched." Now, as he met his colleagues of the Working Committee, it was a grim outlook he had to face. Lord Willingdon had already taken the initiative in a campaign of repression against Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru and the two Khan brothers were in prison. Three provinces had been subjected to special ordinances which suspended all the usual civil liberties.

In the Frontier Province it was charged against Abdul Ghaffar Khan that he was preaching complete independence, and that his Red Shirts were openly preparing for the resumption of civil disobedience. In the United Provinces, where the impoverished tenantry were unable to pay their rents and taxes, the Government had conceded reductions which the local Congress regarded as insufficient. It instructed the tenants in four districts not to pay, pending negotiations. The Government then refused to negotiate until this instruction was withdrawn. This deadlock was followed by a resort to drastic coercion. Nehru and Sherwani disobeyed an order forbidding them to leave Allahabad, and were then arrested. The third province was Bengal, where several terrorist murders may have called for some measures of precaution, but not for ordinances of such indiscriminating severity.

These local troubles were symptoms of the change of attitude which occurred not merely at New Delhi, but in Whitehall also, after the formation of the National Government. The Right wing of the Government had made up its mind to crush Congress, relying

on the support of the Muslims, the minorities and the Princes. In Lord Willingdon's mind the case against it was summed up in the phrase that it posed as an "alternative government." This charge was well founded, and Gandhi admitted its truth. Though much had been conceded in recent years and more had been promised, the Central Government was still an autocracy which could not be expected to tolerate an opposition that claimed to negotiate with it on equal terms.

Gandhi adopted his invariable tactics of frankness and friendliness. In two speeches on the day of his arrival he emphasized his eagerness for cooperation, but he was ready for the struggle. "We must get rid of the fear of death . . . we must embrace it as we embrace a friend. But . . . we must see to it that not even a hair of an Englishman is hurt." His first act was to telegraph a request to Lord Willingdon for an interview. The Viceroy replied stiffly. After justifying his measures of repression, he said that he was willing to see Gandhi, but was not prepared to discuss the ordinances with him. Gandhi answered with a defence of his imprisoned colleagues; he then asked the Viceroy to see him "as a friend without imposing any conditions," but he wound up by enclosing a copy of the resolutions just passed by the Working Committee "tentatively sketching a plan of civil disobedience," which would be suspended "pending our discussion." This brought a refusal to grant an interview "under the menace of unlawful action." The resolutions reaffirmed the demand for complete independence and called for civil disobedience on the old lines. In a message to the nation of 3 January, 1932, Gandhi summoned the people to face "a fiery ordeal" without malice, hatred or violence. The Government instantly struck back. On 4 January, Gandhi and Patel were arrested and interned once more in Yeravda Jail. The Congress had been out-manœuvred, and in the struggle that now began the advantage of the initiative lay with the Government. In these conditions Gandhi's tactics had no chance of success, and yet it is difficult to see, after his disastrous failure to reach an understanding with the Muslims, what other course he could have adopted.

The Government's measures of repression were more drastic, as Winston Churchill put it, than any that had been used since the

Mutiny. A series of new ordinances came simultaneously into force on 4 January. Not only was Congress banned, but all its subsidiary organizations, and power was taken to seize its property, bank balances, offices, *ashrams* and national schools. Its leaders and officials were all interned; the Press friendly to it was rigorously controlled, and the use of the Post Office denied to it. For a time it managed to function somehow, but only by creating a courier service, a secret Press and an underground organization—methods of which Gandhi disapproved. There was again some tax resistance in Gujerat and the United Provinces, and some defiance of the forestry rules and the salt monopoly, but much the most effective form of “disobedience” was the boycott of cloth. The *lathi* was used as before against unauthorized meetings and processions, and the prisons were overcrowded. Special police were quartered and collective fines levied on rebellious localities, and a great part of the Hindu population in Midnapore, in Bengal, migrated elsewhere, as the peasants of Bardoli did in 1930. The speciality of this repression was that the Government, realizing that *satyagrahis* courted arrest, now struck chiefly at property. Fines often ran into thousands of rupees. Of serious violence on the people’s side there was little.

Nehru’s opinion was that “the resistance offered to the British Government was far greater than in 1930.” But it dwindled as the months went on. In January, 1932, the convictions for political offences totalled 14,800; in February they rose to 17,800; in March they dropped to 6,900 and went on falling, until in December they stood at 1,540. The year’s total was 66,900, and of these about ten per cent were released after signing an apology. Civil disobedience went on in a stubborn but spiritless way until 19 May, 1933, when it was suspended for six weeks, and again for another six weeks. Gandhi’s hope that the Viceroy would then release the prisoners, consent to negotiate and grant him an interview was disappointed. On 15 July an informal conference of congressmen at Poona finally wound up mass civil disobedience, but allowed individual disobedience. This was poor generalship. Some hundreds of small-scale protests followed, until the campaign, now manifestly ineffective, was at last brought to an end by Gandhi on 7 April, 1934. Most of the prisoners were then released. The masses relapsed into sullen apathy,

but this experience of suffering and defeat begat no loyalty in them, nor did it weaken their longing for complete independence.

Meanwhile, in March, 1932, there began a chain of events which Gandhi used to turn the struggle into a new channel, and so to regain the initiative he had lost. The British Government announced that, in view of the failure of Indians to solve the communal problem, it would itself devise a settlement. Gandhi then sent from prison to Sir Samuel Hoare a reminder of his own invincible objection to the segregation of the Untouchables in a separate electorate, and warned him that he would resist this solution by a fast unto death. In August the MacDonald award was published. It gave the Untouchables two votes, one of which they would cast in the general Hindu electorate and the other in a separate electorate. Gandhi flatly rejected this compromise and in a correspondence with the Prime Minister announced that his fast would begin on 20 September. MacDonald refused to alter his award.

"The fast which I am approaching," as Gandhi put it in a public statement, "was resolved upon in the name of God, for His work and, as I believe in all humility, at His call." Gandhi's belief was that of all the great mystics, whether Christian or Hindu, "God will rule the lives of all those who will surrender themselves to Him." The believer must achieve complete non-attachment to the things of this world. Then, in his self-effacement, he will hear the Inner Voice. "He has to reduce himself to zero before God will guide him."

Gandhi had to answer the inevitable objection that his fast was a method of coercion. His reply was that it was directed not against his opponents, but against his friends. "It is intended to sting the Hindu conscience into right religious action." "Fasting," he explained, "stirs up sluggish consciences and fires loving hearts to action. Those who have to bring about radical changes in human conditions and surroundings cannot do it except by raising ferment in the society. There are only two methods of doing this—violence and non-violence. Non-violent pressure exerted through self-suffering by fasting . . . touches and strengthens the moral fibre of those against whom it is directed."

The news did sting Gandhi's friends into action. The Hindu world was now roused to save this valuable life. Dr. Ambedkar



dismissed the fast as a "political stunt," but another leader of the Untouchables, M. C. Rajah, worked for a settlement. It was Malaviya who took the practical step of calling a conference of Hindu leaders to work out a solution. The first day of the ordeal, 20 September, was celebrated all over India as a day of prayer and fasting. Better still, Delhi and Calcutta led the way in opening temples to the Untouchables. Ambedkar was induced to join the conference, which sat first in Bombay and then in Poona. By the fifth day of the fast it had devised a scheme which all could accept. The Untouchables remained within the general Hindu electorate, but seats were reserved for their representatives on all the Councils in a ratio based on populations. Further, a new device was adopted: four candidates were to be chosen for each of their seats, through primary elections in which only the Untouchables would vote. This solution satisfied Gandhi. Confronted with this agreement, which Ambedkar signed, though with misgiving, the British Government signified its consent. So, on 26 September, 1932, the Poona Pact was adopted and Gandhi broke his fast. More important than the Pact was a resolution adopted by the Conference, which represented all shades of Hindu opinion, that "henceforth among Hindus no one shall be regarded as an Untouchable by reason of his birth."

To free the Untouchables was now the central purpose of Gandhi's life. But there were obstacles in his path before he could devote himself entirely to this cause. On 22 December he undertook a fast to back a fellow-prisoner, who insisted on doing scavenger's work in jail as a gesture of equality with the Untouchable sweepers. After two days the authorities gave their consent. Next he threatened a fast to secure the opening of the historic temple of Guruvayur. In this case, Rajagopalachari stepped in and conducted a plebiscite, which proved that a majority of the caste-Hindus who used this temple were in favour of admitting the Untouchables.

To the Untouchables Gandhi now gave the name of *Harijans*—Children of God—for "the most despised people are the most favoured of God." In February he started a new weekly paper with this name, which was his mouthpiece for the rest of his life. It was a modest little sheet of eight pages, but as it accepted no advertisements it had space both for two articles from his pen and for a very

readable diary by Mahadev Desai, in the manner of a devout Boswell. One of Gandhi's articles was usually a reply to questions or criticisms from his readers. The first number opened with a moving poem by Tagore on the *hrijans*. In this same month was founded the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, which soon became a powerful national organization devoted to the uplift of the outcastes.

On 8 May Gandhi, distressed by the lack of whole-heartedness among his followers in combating untouchability, started a self-purification fast of twenty-one days, as severe as his fast in 1923 for Hindu-Muslim unity. He afterwards described the experience during the previous night that drove him to this ordeal. "I saw no form. But what I did hear was like a voice from afar and yet quite near. It was as unmistakable as some human voice definitely speaking to me, and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the time I heard the voice. The hearing of the voice was preceded by a terrific struggle within me. Suddenly the voice came upon me. I listened, made certain that it was the voice, and the struggle ceased. I was calm. The determination was made accordingly; the date and the hour of the fast were fixed. Joy came over me." He felt peace throughout the fast, which he described as "an uninterrupted twenty-one days' prayer."

Gandhi, who was released on the first day of this fast lest the Government should be blamed for his possible death, wound up mass civil disobedience, as already stated. He now felt that it was incumbent on him to give the lead in individual disobedience. After giving the Sabarmati *ashram* to the *hrijans* to serve them as a technical school, he was about to set out with its inmates on a march to the village of Ras when he was arrested, with his companions, on 1 August, only to be released on 4 August. Served with an order to quit Yeravda village and reside in Poona, he disobeyed it and was at once re-arrested. This time the game of cat and mouse ended in a sentence of one year's imprisonment. Since the facilities formerly granted to him for his campaign against untouchability were now withdrawn, he started a hunger strike on 16 August. As his life was thought to be in danger, he was released unconditionally on 23 August. He felt in honour bound, since his year's sentence had not expired, to refrain from political work, but he was free to devote himself to the *hrijans*. He always stoutly denied that he had fasted

to secure his release. That was not his intention, though it was the result of his action. It was characteristic of him to argue in this way. His ethics were always subjective. What mattered for him was the motive of an act, rather than its consequences. "The motive alone decides the quality of an action."

Why was it that the plight of the *harijans* affected Gandhiji so deeply? Two reasons blended in his mind. First, it was a blot on the Hindu religion; secondly, his humanity summoned him to end this system of mental, and even physical, cruelty. His description of it, which errs, if at all, by under-statement, deserves to be quoted:

"Socially, they (the Untouchables) are lepers. Economically, they are worse than slaves. Religiously, they are denied entrance to places we miscall 'houses of God.' They are denied the use, on the same terms as the caste-Hindus, of the public roads, public schools, public hospitals, public wells, public taps, public parks and the like. In some cases their approach within a measured distance is a social crime, and in some other rare enough cases their very sight is an offence. They are relegated for their residence to the worst quarters of cities and villages, where they practically get no social services. Caste-Hindu lawyers and doctors will not serve them. Brahmins will not officiate at their religious functions. The wonder is that they are at all able to eke out an existence, or that they still remain within the Hindu fold. They are too down-trodden to rise against their suppressors."

To the first number of *Harijan*, Dr. Ambedkar sent a message. "There is no hope for the *harijans*," he wrote, "unless you get rid of caste altogether." Theoretically and in the long run, Ambedkar was right; practically and in the short run, I think he was mistaken. Caste is an institution far too deeply seated to be destroyed quickly by a frontal attack. Gandhi's strength lay in the fact that he was temperamentally a conservative, who claimed to be an orthodox Hindu (a Sanatanist), venerated tradition and accepted the scriptures as revelation. "I believe Brahminism," he wrote, "to be unadulterated wisdom." When such a man argued that untouchability is a blot on a noble and divinely ordained social system, that it is not ancient and that the scriptural texts which support it are not authentic, the masses would listen to him. He gave them reasons for a humane

reform, which they could accept without abandoning the faith of their fathers. One must not suppose that he was the first of the Hindu reformers to reject untouchability; the *Brahmo Samaj*, the Servants of India and many others had done it before him. But they were intellectuals and rationalists, who never reached the mass mind. Gandhi succeeded because he was a man of faith and emotion, inspired by a burning love for his fellow men, above all for the down-trodden and oppressed. Ambedkar had no interest in the opening of the temples to the *hrijans*. He would have concentrated on their economic grievances. These Gandhi did not neglect, but he realized that untouchability had its origin in superstitions sanctioned by religion.

Though Gandhi's views about caste had no solid historical foundation, they have a deep biographical interest. Up to 1922, he accepted caste pretty much as he found it, and admired it as a proof of the organizing capacity of Hindus. But from the first he rejected untouchability as inhumane. He argued truly that caste preserved Hindu society intact, in spite of many invasions. He did not realize that it had sterilized Hindu civilization and lessened the capacity for military resistance of this fragmented society, to say nothing of the economic waste it involved. Originally he defended the restrictions on interdining and intermarriage, which are the essence of caste, because he regarded any form of "restraint" and discipline as salutary. Later he rejected these restrictions and broke all the rules. But he never insisted on their abolition, or regarded it as a vital reform. Caste, he said, is not "a sin or a degradation" like untouchability—a puzzling verdict. To the European mind the pretensions of the Brahmins seem grossly anti-social, while the Sudras, propertyless labourers, forbidden to study the scriptures, unquestionably suffered "degradation."

Later, Gandhi said plainly that "caste must go" (*Harijan*, 16 November, 1935). What he proposed to retain was the broad division of society into four *varnas* (colours), which was, he believed, the original and divinely ordained institution: (1) priests; (2) warriors and rulers; (3) farmers and traders; (4) labourers.<sup>1</sup> What he valued in

<sup>1</sup> The Aryans, when they entered India, may well have had some such divisions, but they were classes, not castes. Caste is an unique institution which

this system was the "eternal law" that a son must follow his father's occupation. He maintained that these four groups were equal in the sight of God, and should enjoy equal honour here below. He did not realize how much personal frustration this system of hereditary callings must cause, nor the loss of undeveloped talent from which any society suffers which observes it. His doctrine was that every man should earn his bread by manual labour alone; "the needs of the body must be supplied by the body." If doctors, for example, were required, men might study medicine and practise it without payment in their spare time. He knew that this eccentric Ruskinian ideal was unrealizable; none the less, it was based on deep convictions dating from his life in South Africa. Strangely enough, he and the organizations he inspired helped *harijans* to quit their hereditary callings, to acquire an academic education and to qualify themselves as doctors, engineers and teachers. Profound as was his veneration for tradition and the scriptures, he subjected them to an even higher authority. When Ambedkar produced quotations from the scriptures to support untouchability, he brushed them aside as corruptions of the text. "Nothing," he wrote, "can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason, or be capable of being spiritually experienced" (*Harijan*, 11 July, 1936). Later, when confronted with some texts from the Laws of Manu, which subject women to an appalling degradation, he proposed that some authoritative body should expurgate the scriptures (*Harijan*, 28 November, 1936).

After his many fasts Gandhi withdrew, to recover his strength, to an *ashram*, a daughter house of Sabarmati, at Wardha, a little market-town in the Central Provinces. Thence on 7 November, 1933, he set out on a propagandist tour on behalf of the *harijans*, which lasted

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originated in India. Gandhi's generation did not realize that apart from the Aryan gift of Sanscrit, the languages descended from it and the earlier Vedic hymns, Indian civilization and religion are derived predominantly from the elaborate urban culture which existed before the arrival of the more primitive Nordic invaders. This Oppert and Pargiter surmised; it was the discovery of the buried Indus Valley cities that established it. To dogmatize about caste is risky, but it is safe to say that its origins go back to the tensions between the civilized Dravidians and the more backward aborigines, of whom the lowest were compelled to do all the dirty work for their conquerors. Professor Hutton, in the latest book on the subject (*Caste in India*), may be right in his argument that the fundamental thing in caste is the prohibition of interdining, based on food tabus, which resembled those of the South Sea islanders.

ten months and covered the greater part of India. He studied every detail of the question; he preached; he wrote busily; he collected money for the cause—8 lakhs of rupees in all (£60,000), much of it in coppers, some of it in women's jewellery. He enlisted eager helpers for this service, which appealed to many who felt no vocation for prison. Soon, all over the country, choirs were singing in the street songs which hailed the *harijans* as brothers. Sometimes feasts were held at which *harijans* and caste-Hindus ate together. At first the *harijans* were shy and even hostile. Occasionally they stoned well-meaning caste-Hindus who visited their ghettos. Sometimes they were afraid to eat with Gandhi, for they, too, had caste to lose. On a visit to a village of the Unseeables, who venture out only at night because the mere sight of them pollutes a caste-Hindu, the terrified children fled when Gandhi offered them fruit.

Gandhi had to face the fact that the shrinking of the caste-Hindus from the *harijans* was due not only to superstition, but also to the dirty habits of this suppressed population—there are fifty millions of them. Denied the use of wells and tanks, they lived in nauseating filth. Those who skinned carcasses were not paid for this service, so they ate the carrion. Gandhi insisted that they should be paid and urged them to stop eating carrion, taught them how to do the skinning less wastefully, how to utilize the flesh and bones of the carcase, and set up a technical school for tanners at Sabarmati. No detail was too trivial for him, or too unpleasant. Soon he was combating the insanitary habits which pollute Indian villages. Superstition—or is it religion?—teaches that it is a sin for a human being to see his own excreta. Consequently latrines, if there are any, can be cleaned or emptied only by Untouchables, and the night soil must not be used as manure. So Gandhi set to work to organize village sanitation rationally, taught the peasants how to construct latrines and manure pits, how to make composts and how to use them to enrich the exhausted soil of their fields. The aim of this practical idealist was to turn the despised "sweeper" into a sanitary expert. To cure the caste-Hindus of their superstitions, he organized the students in Delhi to clean up the quarters of the *harijans*. Brahmins would clean latrines and caste-Hindus carry a *harijan* corpse in the last rites. The distribution of soap was organized on a great scale.

There were, of course, setbacks in this long campaign. In some villages the *harijans* were suspected of witchcraft. In others, they were beaten because they were becoming "assertive" and dared to wear clothes too good for them. Elsewhere, the upper grade of *harijans* (for they, too, have castes) excluded the lower grade from their temple and their well. Too often the attempt to open the common village well to the *harijans* failed, and a separate well had to be sunk for them. In some cases, after a school had been nominally opened to their children, the caste villagers would terrorize the parents by such devices as pouring kerosene into their well. With methods legitimate and illegitimate the orthodox fought back. They printed many leaflets. In one case they lay down on the steps of an opened temple, to forbid the *harijans* to enter. In Bihar they stoned Gandhi's car. Elsewhere they lay in front of it to stop him. In Poona, they flung a bomb which injured several of his followers. The most painful of the controversies in which Gandhi was involved were with the *harijans* themselves and their ablest leader. Little need be said about Ambedkar's bitter attacks on Gandhi in his later years. Ambedkar was temperamentally poles apart from Gandhi and he had been soured—and no wonder—by the humiliations he had endured as an Untouchable. Gandhi treated him with generosity and usually ignored his attacks. Ambedkar felt a natural resentment, because he had been coerced by Gandhi's fast into signing the Poona Pact. His foolish charges of insincerity against Gandhi personally need no refutation, but it is true that many congressmen were half-hearted in combating untouchability. Gandhi's policy when he composed the governing Board of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* entirely of caste-Hindus—latterly a few *harijans* were included—was surely mistaken. Again, Ambedkar might justly complain that *harijans* elected to the Legislative Councils with the support of Congress had to obey its discipline, even in matters affecting their own people. To my thinking the item in Ambedkar's positive programme that stands out as fundamental is his demand that rural *harijans* shall have the first claim to be settled on new land reclaimed by irrigation from the waste. This far-reaching demand Gandhi supported in a speech at the Round Table Conference, but, so far as I know, he never mentioned it afterwards. In spite of controversies and set-backs, the good work went on. Some wealthy caste-Hindus followed Gandhi's

appeal that each should take a young *harijan* into his family, or bear the cost of his education. Universities agreed to charge no fees to *harijan* students. Municipalities were shamed into giving a sanitary service to their quarters. Week after week, *Harijan* printed lists, sometimes many, sometimes distressingly few, of temples, wells and schools thrown open. In Bombay City, eventually fifty-four temples were opened. Sometimes there was a triumph to record, such as the opening (though this came later) of the famous temple at Madura.

In January, 1934, Bihar suffered from one of the most terrible earthquakes in recorded history. Government and Congress vied with each other in organizing relief. Gandhi visited the stricken province in March, going from village to village on foot. He was convinced that such "calamities come to mankind as a chastisement for their sins." "It is an ennobling thing," he wrote, "for me to guess that the Bihar disturbance is due to the sin of untouchability." One might have supposed that Voltaire, in his immortal commentaries on the Lisbon earthquake, had disposed of such "ennobling" guesses for ever. Tagore was shocked and addressed a remonstrance to Gandhi. "There is," the Mahatma replied, "an indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit. . . . The connexion between cosmic phenomena and human behaviour is a living faith and draws me nearer to my God." Gandhi did not answer Tagore's question—why God had chastised so many innocent children in Bihar, not a few *harijans* among them.

The Poona pledge had called for the removal of the *harijans'* disabilities by statute. Progress in British India was slow; some of the States were prompter. The Viceroy vetoed an enabling Bill for the opening of temples in Madras, on the ground that this was a matter for the Central Legislature. But when two enabling Bills were introduced there by Ranga Iyer, the Government was neutral, for it would grant no facilities, on the ground that Hindu opinion was divided. Malaviya put a casuistical interpretation of his own on the Poona pledge. The Bills were "circulated" and then talked out. Gandhi blamed Iyer for this mishap; Rajagopalachari blamed the Government; Ambedkar blamed Congress. The progressive little State of Aundh led the way with a comprehensive Act. Kashmir, with a mainly Muslim population, moved quickly. Travancore



## THE MIDDLE YEARS

opened all temples controlled by the Maharaja in November, 1936, probably because the *harijans* were threatening to turn Christian. Gandhi made a "pilgrimage" to Travancore in the following year, and felt a sense of triumph as he watched the happy *harijans* marching in procession with hymns to the royal temple of Trivandrum. Baroda and Indore followed in 1938, with Acts which went much further, for they opened wells, hotels and schools as well as temples. With Congress at last in office, the provinces began to legislate in 1938. Bombay moved first, and then Madras (under Rajagopalachari) with two Acts, one of which swept away all the secular disabilities of the *harijans* in so far as legislation can do it, while the other opened the temples in Malabar. In principle the battle for emancipation is won. The reality of equal status can come only by an economic transformation of Indian society and through an adequate system of education. What Gandhiji did was to stir the caste-Hindus to shame and to break the resistance of religion.

The campaign of this mystic, who cleaned latrines one day and opened temples the next, is one of the strangest chapters in history and one of the noblest. Has any saint in human memory done more to lighten the misery of the oppressed and restore their self-respect? He had broken a cruel institution that dated from the night of time, based on superstition, buttressed by religion, sanctioned by many conquests and maintained not merely by prejudice, but by physical shrinking. India honours Gandhiji today chiefly because he led the fight for independence. Humanity owes him an even heavier debt because he opened the road of the Untouchables to freedom.

## CHAPTER XVII

### VILLAGE LIFE

GANDHI'S TOUR for the Untouchables deepened his interest in village life. He believed, he said in *Hind Swaraj*, that "towns favour vice," and he admired the wisdom of the ancestors "who were satisfied with small villages." He was convinced that India's conservative civilization "is not to be beaten in the world. . . . India remains immovable, and that is her glory." But he realized that some adaptations were essential if the old pattern was to be saved from the onrush of industrialization. To this work of reform in village life he wished to devote the rest of his days. Obviously, though he never said so, he was weary of politics. What mattered to him, now and always, were not legislative councils and constitutions, but non-violence and the spinning wheel. The three organizations which he had created for the encouragement of hand-spinning and village industries and the uplift of the *harijans* absorbed so much of his time that he had little to spare for the internal politics of Congress. As he had withdrawn from the active work of Congress after the first campaign of civil disobedience, he now resigned from it.

In this mood it is not surprising that he wished to "bury himself in a village." For a time he was content to use as his headquarters the *satyagraha ashram* near Wardha. This little country town claimed to be the geographical centre point of the Indian Peninsula, and it lay on a main railway line. Eventually, in April, 1935, he settled in Segaon, a village eleven miles from Wardha. Nothing but a dirt-track linked it with the great world. It had no railway station, no post-office, not even a shop. Gandhi was content for a time to share a one-roomed hut with two Untouchables. Gradually a modest little settlement, the Sevagram *ashram*, grew up around him, and his friend Seth Jamnalal, the chief landowner of the district, constructed

a road to Wardha. The village was far from healthy, a furnace in summer, relatively cold in winter and afflicted by malaria. What, then, were its attractions? Western civilization had never soiled its virginity. A big part of its population were *harijans*. And here in every season Gandhi could enjoy the magic of the Indian landscape, when the glories of sunrise and sunset beckoned him to prayer.

Gandhi resigned not merely his leadership but his membership of Congress at its annual session in Bombay in October, 1934; he never rejoined it. His management of its affairs since the Round Table Conference had been sharply criticized by the Left. Subhas Bose said bluntly that Gandhi had failed as a leader. To Jawaharlal Nehru, in the silence of Alipore jail, the news that Gandhi had suspended civil disobedience came with "a stab of pain." The "cords of allegiance" that had bound him to his leader "snapped." The burden of his criticism was that Gandhi, by his fasts and by raising the important but secondary issue of untouchability at the height of the struggle, had distracted the mind of the nation from its chief concern, the winning of independence.

An observer can suggest an explanation which may have guided Gandhi's subconscious mind. Always he acted on instinct, and usually the reasons he subsequently gave were unconvincing afterthoughts. In the first place, it was impossible to keep these struggles going effectively for more than a year with all the leaders in prison. In the second place, no great empire, with its power intact, is likely to yield to a rebellion, violent or non-violent, while it is still going on. The single instance to the contrary is that of the American War of Independence. The "conversion" Gandhi expected might happen gradually, in favourable circumstances. Even then there must be a pause, an interval for reconsideration, and it was a new government that must inaugurate the new policy. Gandhi did not plan it so, but in fact the series of five struggles he led, wave after wave, with intervals for recovery in India and reflection in England, was the best strategy he could have followed. What went wrong with it was that the interval between the second struggle and the third was much too short.

There was another criticism which stung Gandhi more painfully than the charge of failure. He was accused of acting like a dictator.

Actually Gandhi never embarked on a new departure without the consent of the elected Working Committee of Congress, and usually he waited for the approval of the full Congress Committee, if not of Congress itself. Even when he was appointed "dictator" during the first struggle in 1921 he never used his powers. It is true that no duly elected body sanctioned his suspension of civil disobedience in 1933, for the good reason that Congress was then an illegal organization, whose committees could not meet. But he did, even then, consult a gathering at Poona of the few leading congressmen who were not in prison. In the observance of democratic procedure few leaders have been more scrupulous. Anyone less like a dictator one could not wish to meet. He never bullied, never asserted himself, never even raised his voice. The fact was, none the less, that his prestige was so immense, his magnetism so compelling, and the affection men bore him so genuine, that few cared to oppose him when once he had made up his mind. Everyone realized that the surest way to keep the ranks united and to hold the masses was to follow Gandhi loyally. But for this unity there was a heavy price to pay. To retain Gandhi's leadership congressmen were obliged far too often to suppress their own opinions and to swallow his peculiar doctrines, in which they had no real belief. Of this the Mahatma was aware, and in the long and dignified statement, dated 17 September, 1934, in which he foreshadowed his resignation, he did full justice to their loyalty and affection.

Gandhi had the impression that Congress was "dominated by his personality" and that there was no "free play of reason" within it. "Their loyalty cannot blind my eyes to what appear to me to be fundamental differences between the Congress intelligentsia and me." As instances he dwelt on their lack of belief in the potency of the spinning wheel and *khadi*. "Up to a point, suppression of one's own views in favour of those of another, considered superior in wisdom or experience, is virtuous . . . ; it becomes a terrible oppression when one is called upon to repeat the performance from day to day." He next referred to the formation of the vigorous little Socialist group within Congress. He did not wish to suppress the spread of their ideas, "distasteful" though some of them were to him; but his differences with this group were "fundamental," and if they gained

ascendancy in Congress he could not remain within it. There were differences also over the States, but the chief difference was over non-violence, for him a fundamental creed, for the intellectuals only a policy. For all these reasons, "it is plain I should work single-handed."

After a eulogy of the devotion Congress had displayed, in spite of the "growing corruption" in its ranks, Gandhi went on to propose certain "tests" of its true feeling. First and chiefly, he would substitute in its Constitution the words "truthful and non-violent" for the old phrase "legitimate and peaceful," as the definition of the means by which *swaraj* was to be won. Next, he revived his old proposal that instead of paying an annual subscription of four annas every member must deliver a fixed minimum of self-spun cotton yarn. Lastly, no member should be entitled to vote at Congress elections unless his name had been on the register for six months, and he could prove that he had worn only *khaddar* during this period. "Corruption and hypocrisy ought not to be the inevitable products of democracy, as they undoubtedly are today."

Congress went some way towards satisfying the easier of Gandhi's tests. It accepted the registration rule. Henceforward, as Gandhi wished, the elected President was to nominate his Cabinet, the Working Committee, which used to be elected. The yarn franchise was accepted for candidates for office, but not for ordinary members. But the chief test, the "truthful and non-violent" formula, was referred to the provincial committees, and finally rejected in 1936.

How much did his resignation mean? Gandhi felt that he had regained his freedom. But Congress persisted in seeking his advice on every issue that came up for decision. In the hearts of its members he was still their leader to the end of his days. He continued to attend its committees, and to meet the old man's convenience its Working Committee frequently assembled at Wardha. On its register or off it, for a quarter of a century Gandhi was Congress.

Freed from direct responsibility for the running of Congress, Gandhi's active mind now busied itself with all the details of the peasants' daily life. Two problems engaged his incessant attention. The first was the under-nourishment of the village population, which renders it listless, short-lived and incapable of resisting infection. The

second was its under-employment; for the average villager is idle for four, if not six, months of the year. Gandhi realized how miserable is the customary diet of the poorer peasants—starch and little else. He began with an attack on the polished rice of the mills, prepared by a process which deprives it of proteins, fats and minerals. Above all, the loss of Vitamin B causes beri-beri and lack of mental vigour. He set to work, therefore, to campaign for unpolished rice, preferably the hand-pounded rice still used in old-world villages. He wrote articles on the best ways of cooking rice. He was impressed with the value of the soya bean as an almost perfect food. He was convinced that the traditional *gur* of the villages, whether made from sugarcane or the juice of palm trees, is a better sugar than the white powder of commerce. He started research into bee-keeping. Finally, he was horrified because the Indian villager ate practically no green vegetables. So he wrote an article on the importance of salads, and described three plants which grow wild all over India, whose raw leaves make a valuable food. Interspersed with these discourses on diet were articles on snake bites, and others on the prevention of malaria.

Gandhi's chief expedient for ending unemployment in the village was, of course, the *charkha* or the *takli* (spinning wheel or spindle). Second to these came such industries as paper-making, the weaving of mats, the pressing of oil, bee-keeping, the husking and grinding of rice and the making of *gur*. He started a school for village workers at which these crafts were studied. Gandhi succeeded in effecting improvements in the primitive instruments and techniques of the hand textile industry. But he retained its one advantage: its capital equipment was absurdly cheap. Everything necessary, bow, comb, spinning wheel and loom, could be provided for Rs. 4½ (6s. 9d.). The difficulty was to earn a living wage by spinning. A weaver could earn 8 annas (9d.) in a day of eight hours. A spinner, in the same time, earned on an average 3 annas (slightly more than 3d.). This is a miserable wage, even in India, though it must be remembered that an adult agricultural labourer often got no more. As a long-term policy there was nothing to be said for the revival of hand-spinning; here Gandhi stood almost alone. But as Jawaharlal Nehru recognized, there was much to be said for it as a short-term policy. Until electric power can be brought to the villages and the necessary

capital equipment and supervision provided for light industries, what better employment can be found for the peasant and his wife in their many idle hours than spinning? Gandhi knew the village, as his contemptuous critics rarely did. The total result of this immense effort was disappointing. By 1934 the making and marketing of homespun cloth had been organized in five thousand villages, by 1940 in fifteen thousand. But India had seven hundred thousand villages.

The motive of all this work of propaganda and organization was a burning concern for the welfare of the peasantry. But behind it in Gandhi's own mind was a dread of Western industrial civilization, whose tendency is, he believed, "to propagate immorality." What chiefly concerned him was not what European critics of machine industry usually stress—the inhuman monotony of repetition work, the loss of the craftsman's joy and pride in the exercise of his skill. With good reason he detested the overgrown industrial town. He looked on railways as "a most dangerous institution." In the construction of the human body, God "set a limit to man's locomotive ambitions. I am so constructed that I can only serve my immediate neighbours." If he attempts the impossible, to "serve every individual in the Universe . . . man comes in contact with different natures, different religions, and is utterly confounded."<sup>1</sup> But Gandhi did not condemn all machinery; he approved of the sewing machine and the printing press. But these machines, for their construction, presuppose heavy industry. Sometimes he argued that machinery may be beneficent in America, "when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as is the case in India." The argument that machinery will bring leisure did not appeal to him; "God created man to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, and I dread the prospect of our being able to produce all that we want, including our foodstuffs, out of a conjurer's hat."

Finally, he had another reason more fundamental than any of these. He hated machinery because it concentrates the control of production in the hands of the few. "I hate privilege and monopoly. Whatever cannot be shared with the masses is tabu to me." What

<sup>1</sup> *Hind Swaraj*, p. 34.

Gandhi seems to mean is that he objected to power-machinery owned by private capitalists, because it gave them limitless control over the lives of their workers. This is confirmed by his answer to the question, whether he would object to the use of electric power to operate textile machinery, if it were decentralized in villages. He replied that he would approve of its use for cottage industries, if the generating stations were owned by the villages or by the State. But to be dependent on that power for light and water "would be terrible"—meaning, evidently, electric power run by a private monopoly. In these passages Gandhi seems to be stumbling towards Socialism. But he never gave up his belief in the trusteeship of the owning class, whether landowners or capitalists. Why he would allow a landowner to govern the lives of his tenants as their self-appointed "trustee," while he would not allow a private owner to run a power station, is a mystery he never explained. Brought up among the little principalities of Kathiawar, Gandhi's outlook on life was always that of feudalism. Neither to capitalism nor to Socialism could he adjust himself. Oddly enough, in another curious passage he cited with approval an Indian proverb which meant, as he interpreted it, that the land belongs to God (*Harizan*, 2 January, 1937). "In modern language it means the State, i.e. the People." "Real Socialism," he commented, "has been handed down to us by our ancestors."

Much as Gandhi could do through the Press and his two powerful organizations (the All-India Spinning and Village Industries Associations) to change the mind of the old-world peasant, he realized that in the long run the future depended on the village school. To education he devoted constant attention, and with his usual boldness he worked out a comprehensive theory of his own. All instruction was to be given through the vernacular of each province; English should be studied only by advanced pupils in the higher schools. The learning of Hindustani was to be compulsory, for Gandhi was determined to make it the lingua franca for the whole of India. The basis of all the teaching was to be handicraft, preferably spinning, but sometimes carpentry or horticulture. He believed that everything, from mathematics to biology, can be taught through a handicraft. This was an exaggeration of Rousseau's doctrine: learn by doing. Stimulating though the idea is, in practice it cannot be carried very far. In Russia



this idea, adopted with enthusiasm in the first days of the Revolution, had already been abandoned in 1920. Gandhi formed a committee of educational experts under the able leadership of Dr. Zakir Husain, who drafted a detailed scheme of "basic education." There are valuable suggestions in it, but one may be sceptical of a curriculum which devotes three hours and twenty minutes daily to spinning, and only two hours to everything else, including music, drawing, arithmetic, citizenship, the history of mankind, elementary science and the mother tongue. Children will attend the primary school from seven to fourteen. The plan has been tried out in many schools, often (it is claimed) with good results.

A grave complication arose from the start, because Gandhi was determined that the self-governing provinces should enforce prohibition without delay. But the taxation of alcohol supplied one-third of the provincial revenues; without it, to expand the educational services was impossible. Gandhi did not hesitate; he regarded drinking as "more damnable than thieving and perhaps even prostitution," and prohibition as "the greatest moral movement of the century." This attitude is puzzling, for there is little excessive drinking in India, save among the aborigines, whose customs sanction it. Gandhi, however, though his ideal in all else was to reduce government to a minimum, had no scruple about this extreme interference with men's private lives. So, for the sake of prohibition, Gandhi adopted the fundamental idea of basic education—that the children shall pay for their schooling by the sale of the products of the crafts they learn, usually yarn and cloth. The experts reported that the cost of the teachers' salaries (at a miserably low level) could be covered in this way, but not the cost of buildings and equipment. The idea has to meet grave objections. The cloth the children weave will not be saleable until they have acquired some skill. Thereafter they will learn little more; they will be merely half-time mill hands.

Throughout the five constructive years that lay between his resignation from Congress and the Second World War, Gandhi worked steadily for the *harijans*. There was another suppressed element of the population whose interests he never forgot: the women. After the earthquake in Bihar, one of the few regions of Northern India where women were still in *purdah* (veiled seclusion), he called to them to

come out of it and do rescue work. Again and again, in vehement language, he cursed the custom of child marriage. He broke with orthodoxy by advocating the right of widows to remarry. He wrote severely about the custom of dowries. With this fine record of service to women's freedom it may seem strange that he was a passionate opponent of any method of birth control save iron self-restraint, and he wrote at length against it. Two women, the English suffragist Mrs. How Martyn and the American Mrs. Sanger, made pilgrimages to Segaon to convert him, but they failed. As we have seen, Gandhi's ethics forbade all sexual intercourse, even between man and wife, save for the conscious purpose of procreating children. He frankly faced the consequence that this might mean the enjoyment of sexual union only three or four times in a lifetime. He maintained that with strict self-discipline, such rigid chastity is not only possible and right, but easy. He believed that continence is the key to mental and physical vigour. He said plainly that a really virtuous man should not desire progeny. "A man whose activities are wholly consecrated to the realization of Truth, which requires utter selflessness, can have no time for the selfish purpose of begetting children and running a household."<sup>1</sup> It is clear that, throughout the latter half of his long life, Gandhi had succeeded in extirpating sex in himself "for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake." Once during an illness, as he confessed in *Harijan* (26 December, 1936), "whilst he was asleep, he suddenly felt as though he wanted to see a woman." The interesting part of his account of "this frightful experience . . . the blackest moment of my life," is his statement that this was the first time that anything of the kind had happened to him in nearly forty years—that is to say, from the age of twenty-seven onwards.

Gandhi's health during these five years was a constant anxiety to his family, his disciples and his doctors. He worked incessantly, rising before dawn, at 4 or even at 3 a.m.; he took no relaxation, save spinning and his two short daily walks. In spite of his experiments, was his diet really adequate? He slept always in the open air and latterly gained great benefit from massage. But he suffered much from high blood-pressure, due to overwork and anxiety, though he schooled himself to practise the rule of non-attachment inculcated by

<sup>1</sup> *Self-Restraint versus Self-Indulgence*, Vol. II, p. 3.

the *Gita* and the Stoics. Brought up near the sea, in the cooler climate of the West, it is obvious that sultry Segaon did not suit him, and several times he had to go to Juhu, on the shore near Bombay, to recover. Once at Segaon after the rains he contracted malaria, and somewhat later hookworm. Twice, in February, 1936, and in April, 1938, he had a nervous breakdown, which lasted for ten or twelve weeks. He suffered much from overstrain during two visits to Calcutta, where he wore himself out in patiently interviewing many hundreds of the *détenus* (young men suspected of terrorism, interned, often for years on end, without trial) for whose liberation he worked with a great measure of success. In 1936 he had to face the public scandal caused by his eldest son, Harilal, whom Gandhi described as a ne'er-do-well and a drunkard, who "sold himself to the highest bidder" by becoming a Muslim. In 1938 he broke down, apparently from his distress because his wife Kasturba and Mrs. Desai visited the famous temple at Puri, which was still closed to *harijans*. The happiest episode of these years was a visit to the Frontier Province. Here he was always at his ease and full of hope. The Pathans attended his prayer meetings in great numbers, but they behaved with dignity and courtesy, and did not throng him. The Khan brothers were affectionate hosts and he drew encouragement from the fact that the Red Shirts, Muslims renowned for their physical courage, had embraced his doctrine of non-violence.

With the coming into force of the Government of India Act, Congress had to face the familiar moral and tactical problem whether it should contest the elections, and then, after it had swept the country in 1937, whether it should accept office. "India," Gandhi wrote, "is still a prison, but the superintendent allows the prisoners to elect the officials who run the jail." So he advised congressmen to enter the Councils, ply their *taklis* while they sat there, and work for prohibition. Presently he was eagerly drafting a programme for the Ministries which Congress formed, at first in seven and eventually in nine of the eleven provinces. He stressed prohibition, basic education, the relief of the indebted peasants, the conversion of the prisons into humanely run schools and workshops, in which the prisoners should learn to spin and weave; broadly he hoped that the interests of the villages should be a first consideration, and he also

suggested several ways in which the cause of *khadi* might be furthered. He insisted that the Ministers should lead simple lives, travel third class and regard the official monthly salary of Rs.500 (£38) as a maximum; his own view was that Rs.75 (£5 15s.) would be enough. There was an anxious moment before the Ministries were formed; Congress wanted an assurance that the Governors would not use their power of veto. It was satisfied with a formula of Gandhi's to the effect that there should be no interference in the day-to-day administration of provincial affairs by responsible Ministers, though the Viceroy's reply was not an unambiguous acceptance. There were ministerial crises, early in 1938, in the United Provinces and Bihar over the release of political prisoners, but, speaking broadly, Ministers were left at liberty by the Governors to follow their own policies.

From the start the High Command of Congress claimed a right of control over the provincial Ministries. This is not Parliamentary democracy according to the British tradition. Ministers had a dual responsibility, to their electors and to the national leaders of Congress. I doubt whether Gandhi was ever aware that there was anything questionable in this practice. He used his personal prestige in August, 1938, it may be with good grounds, to unseat Dr. Khare as Premier of the Central Provinces. One result of this tightening of party discipline on an All-India scale was that the Muslims in their turn very naturally felt that they had to build up an equally formidable organization of their own. The Muslim League, which had played a quite minor part in the elections of 1937, soon became, under Jinnah's authoritative leadership, a great power. Congress was slow to realize that India was being fatally split between two parties, divided by an irreconcilable feud. Gandhi seems to have lost his grip on Hindu-Muslim relations after the collapse of the Caliphate alliance. In 1935 he wrote sadly about Hindu-Muslim unity: "I have owned defeat on that score." Now, in April, 1938, he made an attempt to come to terms with Jinnah. Prayers were offered in the mosques before their interview, but nothing positive came of it. Gandhi, alarmed by the continuous friction between the two communities, proposed to enlist a corps of non-violent volunteers of both creeds, whose duty it should be to compose disputes before a riot broke out, but he was too frail to organize it, as he might have done in his prime.

The evolution of Congress into a governing party had some disturbing consequences, and Gandhi began to comment on its "corruption" and "decay." Through the ranks of its office-bearers lay the path to jobs. Its atmosphere at this time Nehru contemptuously described as something between a party caucus and a prayer-meeting. Gandhi thought that Ministers were overworked, and he advised them "to burn their files." What touched him more nearly was the use of the police, during labour troubles and communal rioting; this he branded as a moral failure.

The most difficult of the internal discords with which Gandhi had to deal turned round the turbulent figure of Subhas Chandra Bose. His was a magnetic personality, but contentious and unstable. As Mayor of Calcutta, he had much good social work to his credit. He was then in his sympathies inclined to Communism, and made no pretence of believing in non-violence. Later he veered towards Fascism, and everyone knows the part he afterwards played in the Burmese campaign as the ally of Japan. After one term of office as President of Congress, the Left succeeded in re-electing him, in 1939, against the candidate supported by Gandhi, Dr. Sitaramayya. The dispute was now public, and Bose was soon in difficulties with his Working Committee, most of whom (including Nehru) resigned. When Gandhi was called in to nominate another, Bose found himself in an impossible position, withdrew from the Presidency and formed his "Forward Bloc." Underneath the personal rancours in this unhappy affair there was a grave issue. Gandhi believed that Bose intended to start a campaign of civil disobedience on his own lines, which were not those of *satyagraha*. Apart from his fear of violence under such leadership, Gandhi did not think the moment propitious for another struggle.

The affairs of the Princes' States engaged during these years an increasing share of the attention of Congress. Their subjects were now organizing boldly to win freedom, and they looked to Congress for help, and especially to Jawaharlal Nehru, whose fearlessness made him their hero. Gandhi was cautious. He did not want to start a quarrel with the Princes at this stage. He had been disturbed towards the end of 1937 because Congress, led by Nehru, had interfered directly in the affairs of Mysore. In February, 1938, he persuaded

the Working Committee, meeting at Wardha, to pass a resolution which reflected his views. It declared that Congress would not interfere directly in the affairs of the States, though it assured their subjects of its moral support and permitted individual congressmen to help them. But it soon became difficult for Gandhi to maintain this policy. In Travancore, Sir Ramaswami Aiyer was repressing the local reform movement. In December, Gandhi wrote a strong and even threatening article on "misgovernment in the States," in which he warned the Princes that "Congress will one day in the not very distant future replace the Paramount Power." But more repression followed, in certain of the Orissa States, in Jaipur and Hyderabad. But in Rajkot, a little Gujerat state in Kathiawar, of which Gandhi's father had once been the Dewan (premier), Vallabhbhai Patel had won at the end of the year a signal victory over the Thakore (prince) by a campaign of civil disobedience, which ended in a promise of constitutional reforms.

This success led the Princes to organize counter measures for their mutual support. Gandhi published an account of a meeting of their Chamber at Bombay in which the Maharaja of Bikanir had pointed out that Congress regarded the affair of Rajkot as a test case. The other Princes must back this little state. A mobile police group was to be formed for repressive action. Agreement was reached on a typically cynical policy—to refuse responsible government, to crush the local people's organizations, to deport "foreign" agitators, to offer jobs to local reformers, and to redress crying grievances.

One result of this promise of support was that the Thakore of Rajkot challenged the validity of the settlement which Vallabhbhai Patel had concluded, binding him to appoint a committee of ten, of whom Patel was to nominate seven. As a result, civil disobedience was resumed; it was repressed with some violence. Gandhi was deeply moved, for he had been like a father to the Thakore in his boyhood. But his heart at this time was in such a dangerous condition that his doctors had ordered total rest. Kasturba, herself a native of Rajkot, insisted on joining the campaign, and she was soon in prison. Nothing could now restrain Gandhi. Ill as he was, he went to Rajkot. The enquiries which he held confirmed all he had heard about the repression and the ill-usage of prisoners. The Thakore, under the

influence of his Minister Virawala, whom the reformers regarded as the evil genius of the State, would not yield to his remonstrances, and Gandhi, though he had come to dread fasting, now threatened to fast unto death. Even this failed to move the Thakore, and on 3 March the fast began. Gandhi suffered from nausea and retching so severe that he could not drink water, and the doctors feared for his life. He had, at the start of his ordeal, telegraphed to the Viceroy to draw his attention to the Thakore's attitude. Lord Linlithgow acted promptly and invited the Chief Justice of India, Sir Maurice Gwyer, to give a legal opinion on the interpretation of the agreement. This solution Gandhi accepted and broke his fast on the fifth day. A month later Sir Maurice gave his opinion; the agreement meant exactly what Gandhi took it to mean; the Thakore was bound to appoint Patel's nominees.

The Thakore, or rather Virawala, was not yet at the end of his resources. He stirred up the Muslims and other minorities to claim representation on the Committee. Gandhi suggested every conceivable numerical compromise, and would have been content with a majority of only one vote for the party of reform; in vain. No understanding could be reached. Passions rose; Virawala had his partisans, and one of Gandhi's prayer meetings was disturbed by a howling mob through whose ranks he calmly walked. Gandhi then took a characteristic decision. He renounced all that had been gained by the people's campaign and the Chief Justice's award, and with the reluctant consent of the reformers left Virawala to appoint the committee as he pleased. "And so," he commented, "I have left empty-handed, with body shattered, hope cremated. Rajkot has been to me a priceless laboratory."

Some days later (17 May, 1939) Gandhi published a statement of "confession and repentance," which is often misquoted. He was far from thinking that he did wrong to "coerce" the Thakore by fasting. What he repented was his appeal to the Viceroy; that introduced a factor alien to the ethics of *ahimsa*—or conversion. "My fast, to be pure, should have been addressed only to the Thakore Sahib and I should have been content to die, if I could not have melted his heart, or rather that of his adviser." He apologized to the Viceroy and the Chief Justice for the trouble he had given them, and to Virawala for

thinking evil of him. "Having now freed the Thakore Sahib and his adviser from the oppression of the award, I have no hesitation in appealing to them to appease the people of Rajkot, by fulfilling their expectations and dispelling their misgivings."

This quixotic chivalry met with only partial success. The Thakore freed all his political prisoners, restored their confiscated lands and repaid their fines. He promised to concede full civil liberty. But the political reforms, when the scheme was published, were slightly worse, in Gandhi's opinion, than the previous system of government. After this experience, Gandhi advised the peoples of the States to drop mass civil disobedience and to confine their demands to the winning of civil liberty, an independent judiciary, freedom of association and the limitation of the ruler's privy purse to ten per cent of the State's revenues. Such reforms as these would have made life endurable for the middle classes, but on the backs of the peasantry feudal exploitation would still have imposed its crushing load.

Gandhi had withdrawn from the world to his village. But the world would not leave him alone in his hermitage. Visitors sought him out from England and America, Egypt, South Africa and Japan. Lord Lothian, Halide Edib Hanum (the Turkish women's leader) and a group of Muslim teachers from El Azhar University in Cairo came to discuss his way of life with him. Christian missionaries debated with him on their problems. To two deputations of American Negroes he gave all that his generous nature had to give, sympathy with them in their humiliations and faith that his creed of *ahimsa* would bring liberation to them also. Three Japanese intellectuals were among the pilgrims who journeyed to his *ashram*. To Takoaka, a Member of Parliament who sought to promote Indo-Japanese friendship, and asked him for a message, Gandhi spoke plainly of his country's doings in China. "I do not subscribe to the doctrine of Asia for the Asiatics, if it is meant as an anti-European combination. . . . Asia has to relearn the message of Buddha and deliver it to the world. . . . My message is: be true to your heritage."

With this last visitor the distant clash of arms broke the peace of Segao. Gandhiji, who rarely paid much attention to world politics, was compelled to heed the rumblings of the coming storm. He had been deeply stirred by Mussolini's conquest of Abyssinia, and



then came the moral catastrophe of Munich. He wrote an open letter to the Czechs, into which he put all of himself, summoning them to resist the Nazi conquest with organized, non-violent disobedience. To the Jews also, "the Untouchables of Christianity," he addressed the same unwavering message:

"If I were a Jew I would claim Germany as my home even as the tallest gentile German may. . . . I would refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment. . . . Suffering voluntarily undergone will bring them (the Jews) an inner strength and joy which no number of resolutions of sympathy passed in the world outside Germany can. . . . I am convinced that if someone with courage and vision can arise among them to lead them in non-violent action, the winter of their despair can, in the twinkling of an eye, be turned into the summer of hope. And what has today become a degrading man-hunt can be turned into a calm and determined stand offered by unarmed men and women, possessing the strength of suffering given to them by Jehovah. It will then be a truly religious resistance offered against the godless fury of dehumanized man."

So Gandhi stood, unfaltering in his faith, confident that to him had been given the teaching which could avert the orgy of wickedness that threatened humanity. He never doubted the sovereign truth of the message he had to deliver; the fault, if men would not heed it, must lie in him—a torturing reflection. As evening followed morning at his prayers, he sought comfort in Lord Krishna's promise to mankind in the *Gita*: "Whenever there is misery and ignorance, I come."



*A rare meeting between Gandhi and M. A. Jinnah*



*The Mahatma and Pandit Nehru in merry mood*



*Portrait by Clare Leighton*

# LAST YEARS

1939-1948

By Lord PETHICK-LAWRENCE

*Frederick William, Baron Pethick-Lawrence of Peaslake, has had a long life of varied public service culminating in Cabinet rank and a peerage, when, in 1945, he became Secretary of State for India. Born in 1871, he was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he was made a Fellow in 1897. He was President of the Cambridge Union in 1896, and was called to the Bar (Inner Temple) in 1900. With his wife he took an active part in the Suffragette campaign. Labour M.P. for West Leicester, 1923-31, and for East Edinburgh, 1935-45, he was Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1929-31. He has paid several visits to India and sat on the Indian Round Table Conference in London, 1931. As Secretary of State he led the Cabinet Mission to India in 1946, from which ultimately emerged the Dominions of India and Pakistan. His friendship with Gandhi extended over many years.*

## CHAPTER XVIII

### INDIA AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

IN THE summer of 1939 the war clouds were gathering in Europe. In Asia, war was already in progress between China and Japan. As Gandhi, now in his seventieth year, looked out upon the world from his Indian viewpoint he was conscious of the grave peril which threatened mankind. Experience had confirmed him in his profound conviction that to meet aggressive violence with counter-violence was wrong. It wrought lasting injury upon victor and vanquished alike.

Equally harmful, however, in Gandhi's view, was passive acquiescence in alien domination which sprang from cowardice on the part of the oppressed. Indian tradition,<sup>1</sup> he was convinced, supplied the

<sup>1</sup> The early militant tactics of the English Suffragettes at the beginning of this century were based on similar ideas. They were watched closely by many Indian students resident in England at the time.

right alternative, which he had tried out himself in South Africa with considerable success and which he had already embarked on in India in his campaign for her independence. To this method he had given the new name of non-violent non-cooperation.

But on the present occasion the problems that confronted him were truly stupendous. Gandhi had been willing and content in Britain's former wars in South Africa and against Germany to organize Indian assistance on her behalf. Could he, and should he, play a similar role to-day? His hatred of violence and imperialism seemed to point both ways. On the one hand the brutality of the Fascist Powers was even more detestable than that of Britain's enemies in the past. Their capacity for ravage was far greater. Remembering the years he had spent in England and his many English friends, Gandhiji felt that his sympathies were on her side, and he could not bear to think of her being defeated in the struggle.

Nevertheless he could not acquit the British Government and their Allies of imperialistic designs, of which the continued dominance of India was a standing example. Further, by proposing to combat violence by violence Britain was choosing the wrong course, which not only could he not abet but against which he must be allowed actively to protest. At the same time the agitation for the independence of India must not be allowed to die down. So, although he was not prepared to barter his independent attitude toward the war for any bargain with the British Government regarding the emancipation of his country, he did not wish to do anything which would gravely imperil the victory of the Allies.

It was indeed a path through a tangled thicket that Gandhi, in much travail of soul, sought to find and pursue; and the difficulty of finding it for himself was fully equalled by the difficulty of persuading his supporters to tread it along with him, and of making it intelligible and even, to some extent, acceptable to Britain and to the world at large. But if it was the right course these immense difficulties had to be faced and somehow overcome. For every alternative course would be beset by even greater difficulties and would lead nowhere.

The problem of defining the correct attitude to the war was not the only one which he had to solve. To his intense grief, India was not a united country but a sub-continent in which there were many

conflicting communal sections. Cutting across these sectional differences there was the division into British India, comprising the eleven provinces directly under the Governor-General, and Princely India, consisting of some six hundred states, large and small, whose rulers were bound to the British Crown by treaties or engagements involving the somewhat shadowy conception of Paramountcy. It had been one of Gandhi's principal objections to the 1935 Act that in the federal structure which it proposed to set up this Princely India, undemocratic and largely reactionary as he held it to be, would be permanently entrenched in a position to thwart the natural free development of the Indian people.

The first pronouncement on the war by the Working Committee of Congress was made at Wardha on 11-12 August, 1939 (i.e. some three weeks before war actually broke out). It was drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru and presumably had the full concurrence of Gandhi. After declaring that the sympathies of the Working Committee were entirely with the peoples who stood for democracy and freedom, it reaffirmed that the policy of Congress was nevertheless against all attempts to impose a war on India. The British Government, in sending Indian troops to Egypt and Singapore, had flouted, it said, both the All-India Congress and the Central Legislative Assembly. The Governor-General had further taken upon himself to prolong the life of the Central Legislative Assembly for another year. The Committee dissociated themselves from these decisions and called upon the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to refrain from attending its next session. They acted in accordance with this advice.

The British Government formally entered the war against Germany on 3 September, and, in spite of this previous pronouncement of Congress, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, on instructions from home, proceeded at once to declare India a belligerent. At his invitation Gandhi went immediately afterwards to Simla and had a long talk with him. On the following day (5 September) Gandhiji issued a public statement as to what had passed between them: he had spoken purely for himself without instructions from Congress and conscious that with his "irresistible and out-and-out non-violence" he could not represent the national mind; he had not gone to Simla to negotiate

with the Viceroy, and he had returned empty-handed and without any understanding, open or secret. But he had made clear his own sympathies with England and France; the thought of the possible destruction of the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey made him break down; but he consoled himself with the reflection that the apparent failure of God and of the ideal of non-violence was really the failure of man. He confessed that he had in July written a personal appeal to Hitler to save the world from war; and he added: "I am not just now thinking of India's deliverance. It will come, but what will it be worth if England and France fall, or if they come out victorious over Germany ruined and humbled?"

The Working Committee of Congress met again shortly afterwards and at the end of a week's discussion carried, on 14 September, a long resolution in the course of which they stated:

"If war is to defend the *status quo* of imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests and privilege, then India can have nothing to do with it. If, however, the issue is democracy and a world order based on democracy, then India is intensely interested in it. . . .

"The Indian people must have the right of self-determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference, and must guide their own policy. A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic cooperation.

"India is the crux of the problem, for India has been the outstanding example of modern imperialism, and no refashioning of the world can succeed which ignores this vital problem. With her vast resources she must play an important part in any scheme of world reorganization.

"But she can only do so as a free nation whose energies have been released to work for this great end."

In view of the gravity of the occasion, however, the Working Committee took no final decision at this stage and called for a further elucidation of British policy, particularly with regard to India.

On the following day Gandhi issued a statement revealing that the resolution had been drafted by Nehru, and that he had found

himself alone in seeking that whatever support was to be given to the British should be given unconditionally; nevertheless, recognition of India as free and independent seemed to be "the natural corollary of the British profession as to democracy." Gandhi had another interview with the Viceroy on 26 September, in the course of which he pressed for an unambiguous declaration of absolute freedom for India after the war and an immediate share of power at the centre.

The Viceroy made his long-expected statement on 17 October. He said it was not possible at this early stage of the war to define British war aims in more specific terms than he had already done. As to India, he stood by the Instrument of Instructions issued to him when he came out, which enjoined on him "that the partnership between India and the United Kingdom within our Empire may be furthered to the end that India may attain its due place among our Dominions." As to the Act of 1935, he was now authorized by His Majesty's Government to say that at the end of the war they would be willing to "enter into consultation" with all sections in India with a view to its "modification." He stressed that in particular the "minorities" would be duly consulted. He gave a general caution against claiming too rapid advance to self-government. As to the immediate situation, he suggested a "consultative group" representative of all major political parties in British India and of the Indian Princes, to be presided over by himself, for the association of public opinion in India with the conduct of the war.

This statement was promptly condemned by Gandhi as quite unsatisfactory. It showed, he said, that there was to be no democracy for India if Britain could prevent it. He added: "Congress will have to go into the wilderness again before it becomes strong and pure enough to reach its objective." Meeting on 22 October, the Congress Working Committee resolved that it would give no support to Great Britain in the war, and it called on all Congress Ministries in the provinces to tender their resignations. It foreshadowed further steps in opposition to the Government, which it said must be strictly of a non-violent character. Gandhi subsequently announced that the control of civil disobedience had been left in his hands. He required the strictest discipline.

In accordance with the instructions of Congress, the Ministries in



the provinces where there were Congress majorities proceeded to tender their resignations, and under Section 93 of the 1935 Act the Governors took over control of the administration. Apart from this, there were no new developments of the situation in India during the winter of 1939-40 and the following spring. Lord Linlithgow pursued his search for the "consultative group," representative of all major political parties in India, to deal with the conduct of the war. But though he brought together to meet him Gandhi, Jinnah and Rajendra Prasad (President of Congress for the year), he made no headway. Gandhi replied in the Press declaring that no progress could be made until an acceptable declaration of war aims about India was forthcoming; as soon as a declaration to free India at once was made, an interim solution would be easy to find and the protection of minority rights would be simple; it was the fault of Britain's "divide and rule" policy that no agreement between communities had been found. Nevertheless, on several occasions he made it clear that the time had not come for civil disobedience, and said he was convinced that Congress would not embark on it until he gave the word. At the end of January he stated explicitly that the forthcoming celebrations of Independence Day must not be mistaken for a declaration of civil disobedience. "I must confess," he said, "that I have in my mind neither strikes nor no-tax campaigns as parts of the coming struggle, if it comes at all."

Various attempts to heal communal differences were made during the period. In November, 1939, Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah had conversations in Delhi following on those with the Viceroy, referred to above, but they reached no agreement. In January, 1940, a correspondence took place between Gandhi and Jinnah in the course of which the latter said: "You start with the theory of an Indian nation that does not exist." Gandhi replied to this letter: "It dashes to the ground all hope of unity." He trusted that Jinnah did not represent the considered mind of his colleagues, for "his picture of India as a continent containing nations counted according to their religions would undo the effort Congress had been making for over half a century."

Following shortly after this correspondence the All-India Muslim League met in conference at Lahore on 24 March, 1940. Very

important resolutions were passed relating to Muslim participation in the future of India. Starting with an emphatic reiteration that the scheme of federation embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935, was totally unsuited to, and unworkable in, the peculiar conditions of India, they proceeded to lay down the only basis on which a constitutional plan acceptable to Muslims could be framed. It was their view that

“Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the whole constitutional plan is reconsidered *de novo*, and that no revised plan would be acceptable to the Muslims unless it is framed with their approval and consent. . . . It is the considered view of this session of the All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute ‘independent States’ in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.”

The Muslim League Working Committee was accordingly authorized “to frame a scheme of constitution in accordance with these basic principles, providing for the assumption finally by the respective regions of all powers such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs and such other matters as may be necessary.” This was the first time that the Muslim League had gone on record as being in favour of what was in effect Pakistan; and it will be seen that the pronouncement, particularly in the last sentence, was couched in wide and all-embracing terms.

The events of May, 1940, when the Nazi forces overran Western Europe and the Coalition Government was set up in Great Britain, had their repercussions in India. There was general detestation of the aggression of the Axis Powers and a desire for their defeat by the Allies. The way that Gandhiji’s mind was working was illustrated by an important article which he wrote on 1 June in *Harijan*, controverting a demand made for immediate civil disobedience. If the country were demonstrably non-violent and disciplined, he said, he would

unhesitatingly declare civil disobedience; but it was not. "If the British Government will not *suo motu* declare India a free country having the right to determine her own status and constitution, I am of opinion that we should wait till the heat of the battle in the heart of the Allied countries subsides and the future is clearer than it is. We do not seek our independence out of Britain's ruin. That is not the way of non-violence."

Later in the month the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha and found itself unable to accept in its entirety Gandhi's attitude to the war and, in particular, his view that India should not maintain her own armed forces to defend her freedom against external aggression and internal disorder. In a resolution passed on 21 June, and later endorsed by the All-India Congress Committee, they said:

"Mahatma Gandhi has presented to the peoples of the world, crying for relief from the crushing burden of war, a weapon in the shape of organized non-violence designed to take the place of war for the defence of a people's right and freedom against armed aggression. He feels that at this critical phase in the history of man the Congress should enforce this ideal by itself declaring that it does not wish India to maintain armed forces to defend her freedom against external aggression or internal disorder.

"While the Working Committee hold that the Congress must continue to adhere strictly to the principle of non-violence in their struggle for independence, the Committee . . . have come to the conclusion that they are unable to go to the full length with Gandhi, but they recognize that he should be free to pursue his great ideal in his own way."

They therefore absolved him from further responsibility for Congress activities: This meant that Gandhi and the Congress were for the time being in disagreement. But, as will be seen later, the severance did not last for very long.

On 29 June, 1940, Lord Linlithgow sounded Gandhi as to the likely reactions of Congress to a further declaratory statement on behalf of H.M. Government covering various points. Writing in *Harijan* on 6 July, Gandhi, referring to this interview but without disclosing the precise proposals put to him, indicated the view which, in his opinion, Congress ought to take. First of all, India's immediate

objective must be unadulterated independence. Secondly, as regards providing against internal disorder and external invasion, it was clear to him that those who believed in the necessity of India having armed forces would be driven sooner or later to enlist themselves under the British banner. He hoped, therefore, that Congressmen would resolutely decline to have anything to do with the use of arms. Thirdly, the offer of enlarging the Viceroy's Council ought not to be countenanced by Congress if it swore by independence and non-violence. He realized that, if Congress accepted such proposals, congressmen could again become Ministers in the provinces and also could become members at the centre; they would have an insight into the war machine; but they would be merely used for preparing India to defend Britain, and Gandhi trusted that the temptation would be resisted and that Congress would stand by the demand for independence.

On the following day, 7 July, the Working Committee, meeting at Delhi, passed a resolution calling for an acknowledgment by Britain of the complete independence of India and for a declaration that, as an immediate step in giving effect to it, a provisional National Government would be constituted at the centre. It proceeded as follows:

"Unless the aforesaid declaration is made, and a National Government accordingly formed at the centre without delay, all efforts at organizing the material and moral resources of the country for defence cannot in any sense be voluntary or as from a free country, and will, therefore, be ineffective.

"The Working Committee declare that if these measures are adopted, it will enable the Congress to throw in its full weight in the efforts for the effective organization of the defence of the country."

This was an important pronouncement. It certainly went further in the direction of an "offer" by Congress to help in the war *on terms* than any previous resolution. Some speculation, therefore, has arisen since as to whether, if H.M. Government had come boldly forward at that time and grasped the hand of Congress and had, through the medium of the Viceroy, or even more directly by sending out a Cabinet Minister, entered into negotiations on it with the leading

Congress personalities, some real cooperation in the actual prosecution of the war might have emerged from the discussion.

History is full of question marks as to what would have been the consequences of decisions that were never made and of events that never took place. The most that can be said is that there were probably men, both in the British Government and in Congress in India, who would have been ready to reach a compromise solution. But Gandhi was certainly not among them. For, however friendly he was to the British people, however much he hated the idea of the triumph of the Axis arms and ideology, he could not bring himself, in this war, to go even so far as non-violent cooperation with the Allies. Still less was he prepared to give active support to the whole campaign of recruitment and war preparation which was already proceeding at an accelerating pace throughout the length and breadth of India. Apart from the individual views of Gandhi, there was so wide a divergence between the Congress conception of Indian freedom and of their role in it, and that held by H.M. Government, that there was no real likelihood of accommodation between them.

What actually happened was that on 8 August the Viceroy issued a statement outlining the British Government's proposals. For the short-term programme the main points were: (1) the invitation to a number of representative Indians to join his Executive Council; and (2) the establishment of a War Advisory Council to meet at regular intervals and to include, in addition to party leaders, representatives of the Indian States and of other interests in the national life of India as a whole. As to the long-term programme, he said that H.M. Government were in sympathy with the view that the framing of the new constitutional scheme should be primarily the responsibility of Indians, but that this could not be undertaken at a time when the Commonwealth was "engaged in a struggle for existence." H.M. Government would, however, promote the setting up of a representative constitution-making body with the least possible delay after the conclusion of the war. He added that Britain could not divest herself of the responsibilities which her long association with India had imposed upon her, nor could H.M. Government contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the welfare of India to any system of government whose authority was directly denied by

large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government. They trusted, however, that for the period of the war all communities would cooperate in making a notable contribution to the victory of the world cause which was at stake. They hoped that in this process new bonds of union and understanding would emerge, which would pave the way towards the attainment by India of free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth.

The reaction of Congress to this Viceregal statement was instantaneous and hostile, and Gandhi described it as "deeply distressing." It widened, he said, the gulf between India, as represented by the Congress, and Britain. In a resolution passed at Wardha, the Congress Working Committee accused the British Government of rejecting their friendly and patriotic offer of cooperation and of making the issue of the minorities an insuperable barrier to India's progress.

The full All-India Congress Committee meeting in Bombay on 17 September endorsed this attitude and called on Gandhi, now that the reason for their severance from him no longer applied, once more to guide them in the action to be taken. Gandhi, accepting this mandate, decided to promote a campaign of non-cooperation which should be developed in three phases. The first phase was symbolic and involved only a handful of Gandhi's picked friends and associates; the second phase was "representative," and was open to the leading Congress personalities; the third phase, which might never be reached, was mass civil disobedience. Gandhi was most insistent that the *personnel* of the volunteering *satyagrahis*<sup>1</sup> should be carefully scrutinized by himself, and that strict discipline should be observed—previous notification of the Authorities, non-violence, the absence of mass demonstrations during arrest and acceptance of prison rules when they did not conflict with health or dignity. He regarded a willingness to court rearrest on release from prison as part of the clear duty of the *satyagrahi*. Gandhi was quite frank with the Government of India regarding his plans. Before the campaign began he had a long interview with the Viceroy (on 27 September, 1940) in which he made clear his intention to invite Congress leaders to express publicly their opposition to the war, and he sent subsequently

<sup>1</sup> See p. 59.

to the Viceroy's private secretary, on 11 November, 1940, a letter enclosing the detailed instructions he was issuing to congressmen who were candidates for *satyagraha*.

At the commencement of the campaign he expressed his intention of continuing the publication of *Harijan*, but later decided to suspend it. The Government had given notification on 24 October, 1940, under Defence of India Rule 41, "prohibiting the printing or publishing of any matter calculated to foment opposition to the prosecution of the war," and Gandhi did not want to get into conflict with the Government over the paper and distract attention from the main *satyagraha* campaign.

Nehru, Azad, Patel and many other prominent congressmen were arrested as a result of this campaign. But as the year 1941 wore on the number of persons offering themselves for *satyagraha* dwindled. There was some discontent in Congress ranks with Gandhi's policy, which occasionally broke out in open criticism. Some of the malcontents wanted a more active policy to be pursued against the British Government, and members of the Forward Bloc pressed for the abandonment of the prohibition on violence. Others were disposed to allow Congress Ministers to resume office in the provinces, and were not averse to cooperating in various ways in the prosecution of the war. Some of the *satyagrahis* wanted to be allowed to adopt the hunger strike in prison as a protest against the conditions of prison life.

Gandhi came out into the open with a statement, issued on 30 October, containing an outspoken defence of his policy and a direct rebuttal of the case of his critics. Marshalling their contentions, he replied to them one by one. He dealt first with the alleged lack of enthusiasm and the falling off of candidates for rearrest. That fewer volunteers were coming forward, he said, was but natural. It must be recalled that civil disobedience was individual and restricted to representatives. The list of representatives being limited, it must one day be exhausted. The call for mass action would not come before the close of the war. He proceeded:

"There is neither warrant nor atmosphere for mass action. That would be naked embarrassment and a betrayal of non-violence. What is more, it can never lead to independence. Mass

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action at this stage without communal unity is an invitation to civil war. If civil war is to be our lot, it will come; but, if I know the Congress mind, it will never come at the wish or invitation of the Congress."

Dealing with the reluctance of some released *satyagrahis* to court rearrest, he said that in the present case, as formerly in South Africa, he had to make this demand on them. Any other course would reduce the struggle to a farce. Independence could not be gained without a full measure of suffering. Those who for some just reason could not court imprisonment should engage in corporate constructive activity, including spinning. "I dare to believe," he added, "that if congressmen were enthusiastic believers in communal union and removal of untouchability and the like there could be no communal discord, and there would be no antagonism, such as it is, for *harijans*." Regarding his own leadership, he said that he had laid down the conditions from the very inception of the programme of non-violence. He must therefore adhere to his conditions as long as he himself had a living faith in them. As to indiscipline, he said that it was wrong to say that there was universal indiscipline among congressmen, or that all were unfit to be called *satyagrahis*. He knew that violent men had crept into the organization under the guise of non-violence; but he knew also cases of exemplary discipline. Those who could not stay the test would stay out without dishonour. Hypocrites and smugglers would be rejected when found out.

As to prison conditions, Gandhi said that *satyagrahis* who sought imprisonment could not, with any dignity, quarrel with the treatment they got except when their honour was attacked. But he suggested that the rations of all political prisoners should approach what is known as balanced diet, with the permission to replenish it at the prisoner's expense. Newspapers and books were as important as food. He held that deprivation of this amenity was an additional punishment for a political prisoner.

Gandhi next proceeded to defend non-violent civil disobedience on grounds of both principle and expediency. He was not out to cause embarrassment to the Government.

"Of course it would be different if we had resorted to armed rebellion. Then the saying that 'Their difficulty becomes our



opportunity' would apply. It is obvious that an exactly opposite rule should apply when an opposite method is adopted. It is worse than suicide to resort to violence—i.e. embarrassment—under cover of non-violence. We may not be 'temperate and furious' at the same time."

To those critics who argued that to be logical they should then give up civil disobedience altogether, Gandhi replied that civil disobedience was the assertion of a right (e.g. to speak against participation in this war or all wars) which law should give, but denied. If performance of a duty incidentally caused embarrassment it could not be helped.

Finally, Gandhi commended his thirteen-fold constructive programme to all congressmen and non-congressmen who were not willing or not selected to undertake *satyagraha*. This programme included communal unity, which was worth more than the whole parliamentary programme. It included the removal of untouchability, for if that lived Hinduism, and with it India, died. It included the spinning wheel and village industries. It included the emancipation of India's manhood—*kisans* (peasants), labourers and all those who were weary and heavy laden. If congressmen, he said in conclusion, did not understand and appreciate this all-inclusive and mighty programme they did not know the A B C of non-violence or the elements of civil disobedience.

This unequivocal restatement by Gandhi of his principles and policy did not, however, have the effect of bringing into accord with him all the members of Congress. Large numbers, in spite of their reverence for their leader, remained unconvinced of the wisdom of his tactics. The number of *satyagrahis* offering themselves for rearrest continued to decline. There was considerable privately expressed criticism and some of it found public expression.

Two outside events brought this opposition to a head and forced the Working Committee, and later the All-India Congress Committee, to come to a definite decision as to whether they would continue to follow Gandhi's lead or strike out on a different line of their own. The first of these was the action of the British Government in releasing all the civil-disobedience prisoners, including Nehru and Azad. The second was the entry of Japan into the war and her lightning

successes in the Pacific, which brought her within striking distance of India.

When the Working Committee met at Bardoli on 28 December, 1941, it was evident that there were three trends of opinion. There were those who wished to continue supporting and carrying out Gandhi's full programme under his leadership. There were those who disbelieved in the principle of non-violence, and also in any idea of no embarrassment of the British in their war against the Axis Powers. They wanted to use Britain's difficulty as India's opportunity, and to go all out to wrest independence from the British Government at a time when, as they thought, its weakening hands were more than fully engaged in the world war. There were, thirdly, those who were not disposed to allow the Japanese "King Stork" to substitute himself for "King Log," and who were impressed with the need to associate Congress with the defence of their country against the aggression of a new foreign Power. While they did not share Gandhi's religious scruples about non-violence in war, they recognized that it was expedient to employ it at this juncture in the agitation against British domination.

In the end it was this third section that carried the day by a majority vote. In the course of the discussion leading up to this result the precise meaning of the resolution passed at Bombay by the All-India Congress Committee on 16 September, 1940, came under review.

In a letter written by Gandhi to Azad on 30 December, he said that he had discovered that his interpretation of the resolution was not shared by the majority of his colleagues, and on re-reading it he found that they were right. He continued:

"The resolution contemplated material association with Britain in the war effort as a price for guaranteed independence of India. If such were my view and I believed in the use of violence for gaining independence, and yet refused participation in the effort as the price of that independence, I would consider myself guilty of unpatriotic conduct. It is my certain belief that only non-violence can save India and the world from self-extinction. Such being the case, I must continue my mission, whether I am alone or assisted by an organization or individuals. You will, therefore,

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please relieve me of the responsibility laid upon me by the Bombay resolution."

The main resolution, carried by the Working Committee on the same day, expressed the view that account must be taken of the new developments of the war and its approach to India, adding that the sympathies of Congress were inevitably against the aggressors; but only a free India could defend herself and the larger world-causes on a national basis. It reaffirmed the "Bombay resolution" as the policy of Congress. In a supplementary resolution, relating specifically to Gandhi's letter to Azad, they recognized the point he had raised and relieved him of the responsibility laid upon him.

One of the qualities of the Mahatma which endeared him to his colleagues and associates was that not only did he never allow political differences between them to embitter personal relationships, but that also when defeated he was careful, while retaining his personal opinion and freedom of action, not to do anything to cause a breach in the ranks of Congress. Accordingly, when the Bardoli resolution came before the larger body of the A.I.C.C. on 15 January, 1942, he rose immediately after Azad had spoken and made a strong appeal to the delegates present to accept it unreservedly, irrespective of considerations of non-violence. He made no secret of the fact that a split in Congress was imminent and that he was prepared to go to any length to prevent it. Civil disobedience had been wisely reserved for him as an expert, and so far as he was concerned there would be none apart from the propaganda against war contained weekly in his paper *Harijan*. In view of this appeal, the Bardoli resolution was carried by a large majority and all the amendments to it from various quarters were defeated. *Satyagraha* was ended, and Gandhi was once more officially outside the working ranks of Congress.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CRIPPS OFFER AND ITS SEQUEL

**A**T THE opening of the year 1942 almost the whole world was at war. It had spread to every continent except South America, and to every ocean except the Antarctic. In many countries it had become the principal concern of the inhabitants, invading their civil occupations and threatening their daily necessities of life. While in Europe the Axis Powers were being held in check, in Asia the Japanese were sweeping forward through the western Pacific, with the American fleet crippled and six thousand miles away. Singapore, Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-China and Burma were falling and war had come so close to India by land, by sea and by air that it seemed quite likely that in a matter of a few weeks the front line of battle might run across Indian soil. How would India react? Would she stand or would she panic and collapse?

She certainly did not panic, and outside high political circles her reaction was emphatic and almost unanimous. Princely India threw in its lot with Britain, and throughout the length and breadth of British India lakhs<sup>1</sup> of volunteers came forward to join the armed forces and to promote the defence of India in a multitude of civilian activities. Political India hesitated. The Muslim League would not cooperate as a body, but it did not stand in the way of cooperation by its members. They were free to fight, to assist defence, to engage in war industries and even to take part in the political administration of the provinces. Congress threw no obstacle in the way of recruiting of Indians outside its own ranks. Its members could, if they wished, work in factories producing for the war, they could engage in measures of civil defence (preferably in separate organizations under Congress control), they could even, at this stage, play some part in

<sup>1</sup> A lakh is 100,000.

lesser local government. But Congress would not cooperate with Britain in fighting the war, or even in the defence of Indian soil, except on terms; and those terms seemed to the British Government of the day impossible to accept in their entirety.

Gandhi disapproved of all war—not merely of aggressive, but also of defensive, war. It was race suicide. Mankind must find another way or perish. There were, therefore, no terms on which he was open to consider cooperation with the British in the prosecution of the struggle unless, which he knew in advance to be impossible, they were willing to abandon fighting and adopt, on a world scale, or at least in the defence of India, his policy of non-violent resistance. In some ways this seemed a direct and simple approach. Complication arose, however, because he was living in a world where his ideas were not accepted—not even in India, the land of the Buddha and of Asoka; not even by Congress, the organization which he had done so much to build up and of which he had been for so many years the revered leader. Non-violent resistance, to be successful, ought to be pursued by a whole people. It had no chance of success if it were the policy of a part only, while the other part, perhaps even the major part, carried on the struggle by violent means.

Moreover, it was not only on this fundamental issue of war ideology that Gandhi was separated from the British. He was also becoming fully convinced of the complete lack of sincerity of all British offers of freedom to India. Churchill had expressly stated that the Atlantic Charter was not in terms directly applicable to India, which had already had its path to self-government charted out for it in previous pronouncements. Gandhi distrusted the word "dominion," which smacked to him more of domination than of freedom. He distrusted the idea of the postponement of constitutional change until after the war. He feared the phrases about concern for minorities which were never absent from statements of Viceroys and Secretaries of State. He was convinced that they would prove in the end excuses either for doing nothing or for vivisectioning India, or for so biting and reining in its vital energies as to make them servants of imperialism and reaction.

Into this bleak and unpromising milieu a Cabinet Minister was dispatched by the British Government in the hope of effecting an

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agreed settlement. The announcement was made by the Prime Minister on 11 March, 1942. Speaking in the British House of Commons, Winston Churchill said that in the face of the Japanese advance the Government wished to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader. Promises had already been given that, as soon as possible after the war, India should attain Dominion status in full freedom and equality with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions, under a constitution to be framed by Indians by agreement among themselves and acceptable to the main elements in Indian national life. This was, of course, subject to the fulfilment of British obligations to certain sections in India, and to the settlement of certain lesser matters. He proceeded as follows:

"In order to clothe these general declarations with precision and to convince all classes, races and creeds in India of our sincere resolve, the War Cabinet has agreed unitedly upon conclusions for present and future action which, if accepted by India as a whole, would avoid the alternative dangers either that the resistance of a powerful minority might impose an indefinite veto upon the wishes of the majority, or that a majority decision might be taken which would be resisted to a point destructive of internal harmony and fatal to the setting up of a new constitution."

A member of the War Cabinet, Sir Stafford Cripps, would therefore go to India, carrying with him the full confidence of His Majesty's Government, to lay before Indians their proposals and to satisfy himself by personal consultation that they would achieve their purpose.

Sir Stafford set out at once on his journey and reached Delhi on 22 March. He was no newcomer to India, nor stranger to her principal personalities. Over two years before, at Christmas, 1939, he had paid a personal visit to India and got into touch with Gandhi and Nehru and with Jinnah and the leaders of other sections. He was, of course, at that time not a member of the Cabinet, and represented no one but himself, but he had canvassed with his Indian hosts an approach to a solution not very different from that which he was now bearing officially on behalf of His Majesty's Government. He had come away confident that, properly approached, representative

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Indians would accept some such scheme and would thus break the deadlock which had existed for so long. Since then he had retained his friendship with several of the Indian statesmen, keeping up a regular personal and friendly correspondence with them. Hence his choice for the Mission was regarded as an exceptionally happy one.

For a whole week he made no public disclosure of the terms of the draft declaration he had brought with him. But he showed it and expounded it to members of the Viceroy's Executive Council, to Gandhi, who travelled from Wardha to New Delhi in order to visit him, to Jinnah and to key men in the principal political organizations. At last, on 29 March, at a Press conference, he gave it out *in extenso* and expounded it to the Press and released it for publication.

The declaration was to the effect that, immediately after the end of the war, elections should be held for the provinces of British India, and that following at once on that the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the provincial legislatures should forthwith (meeting as a single electoral college) elect a constitution-making body. The Indian States would be invited to appoint representatives to it in the same proportion to their population. This body, so augmented, would be charged with the task of framing a constitution for a "Union of India which would be a Dominion with the same full status as the other Dominions." The declaration proceeded:

(d) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution so framed subject only to:

"(i) the right of any Province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new Constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.

"With such non-acceding Provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon a new Constitution, giving them the same full status as the Indian Union, and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.

"(ii) the signing of a Treaty . . . negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body."

This treaty, it said, would cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian

ands; it would provide for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but it would not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth. There would have to be, at the same time, a revision of the treaties with the Indian States. Finally, dealing with the interim period, the draft declaration said that though His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for, and retain control of, the defence of India, they desired and invited the immediate and effective participation of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of the country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations.

It will be seen that no radical departure from previous pronouncements was to be found in the declaration. But it broke new ground (1) in giving a more specific promise to implement immediately after the war a constitution framed by Indians; (2) in detailing the machinery by which the constitution-making body should be brought into being; (3) in enabling, for the first time, provinces to opt out of the constitution and secure a separate Dominion status for themselves; (4) in proposing, for the first time, a treaty to be negotiated between Britain and the future Indian Union and in laying down the principal subjects to be covered by it. It was, therefore, as the Prime Minister had foreshadowed, an offer "clothed with precision" which the leaders of Indian opinion could accept or reject with knowledge of its implications.

The terms of the "Cripps offer," which thus became public for the first time, were read in the United Kingdom with much satisfaction. Politicians of all shades of opinion, including those who had persistently called for a settlement of the "Indian problem" on lines acceptable to Indians, welcomed them in the hope that they would end the distrust which had so long poisoned the relations between the two countries. In the British Commonwealth generally they were regarded as mapping out the path of India to a fairly rapid realization of self-government on Dominion lines. In the United States of America, where there had always been strong criticism of British rule in India, opinion was distinctly favourable.

In India its reception was mixed. Some political leaders were prepared to treat it as a genuine olive branch and to accept it as it



stood. They felt that it provided not only a *modus vivendi* for the present emergency and a future settlement of the relations between Britain and India, but also a workable compromise for resolving communal disagreement. Others, including both Jinnah and Azad, were prepared to explore its possibilities. Clarification, and perhaps amendment if that were permissible, might rid it of aspects of which they disapproved.

Gandhi's attitude was much more uncompromising. This should occasion no surprise to those who have followed, in the preceding pages of this book, the trend of Gandhi's mind and thought. He did not want India to become enmeshed in the British war effort. He did not regard non-violent resistance to aggression as a visionary philosophy, but as a definite, practicable policy which could be adopted with a good prospect of success if it were fully and consistently carried out. It was not necessary to postulate the ultimate defeat of British arms to contemplate that Japanese forces might overrun parts of India as they were already overrunning other parts of Asia. If that were in fact to come about, non-violent non-cooperation with the Japanese, adopted as a sequel to an unsuccessful violent resistance, would be foredoomed to failure. Even, therefore, if the promise of Indian independence had been far more satisfying than he deemed the present offer to be, he would not have wished to buy it at the price.

But the more he examined the proposals and thought about them the less they attracted him. If and when the British won the war, how would they construe and fulfil the terms that they were offering today? The kind of freedom that Gandhi was struggling to secure did not, in his opinion, emerge from them. The insistence on British reservations would limit and restrict the freedom of the Constituent Assembly and would keep India still subject, in some measure, to the will of Britain. But worse than this, the proposals of the British Government contemplated for the first time the possibility that India would become not one, but more than one, independent state. The provision for an option by provinces was a substantial concession to the Muslim League's policy of partition. The provision that Indian States would be free to stand out of the proposed Indian Union and remain in treaty relations with Britain held dangerous possibilities.

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As to the proposed immediate reconstitution of the Viceroy's Executive Council, there was nothing new in it and he and Congress had already rejected it. The Indians who entered it would not have real freedom of action; they would still be the subordinates of the Viceroy and of the British Raj. Gandhi was not long, therefore, in making up his mind with regard to the offer. Having expressed his opinions and discussed them with his Congress colleagues, he left New Delhi and returned to his *ashram* in Wardha, where he stayed for the remainder of the visit of Sir Stafford Cripps to India.

Cripps persevered in clarifying, amplifying and commending the offer in Press conferences and in direct talks and correspondence with Azad, with Jinnah and with other leaders of political thought. He explained the wide freedom which, in accord with the Statute of Westminster, the term "Dominion status" implied, including the right of secession from the Commonwealth; he elaborated the procedure by which dissident provinces could opt for withdrawal from the Indian Union; he gave assurances that there would be no insistence on a privileged position for British capital or commercial interests. On these points regarding the future he appeared to be making considerable progress in satisfying both the Congress and Jinnah. But on the proposed interim set-up he was less successful. He explained that though the British Government could make no fundamental change in the constitutional position during the continuance of the war, that would not prevent "conventions" being recognized by which the members of the Viceroy's Executive Council would, in fact, have a great deal of real power. He could not, however, be too precise as to the details, as these were matters which would have to be settled by the Viceroy and implemented by him in the day-to-day working of the Council.

This did not satisfy Congress, who wanted more categorical and specific assurances that the Council would act as a Cabinet and, except for matters appertaining to the Commander-in-Chief, not be subject to the Viceroy's veto. The view of Cripps and His Majesty's Government was that such a specific convention would carry them further than they were entitled to go. It would amount, in effect, to tearing up an Act of Parliament, and installing in a position of absolute power in India certain individuals who would, in the last

resort, be responsible to no one but themselves. On this issue, therefore, the discussions ultimately broke down. Incidentally, it should be noticed that the question of the communal composition of the Council, which proved in later years so difficult to adjust, was not under discussion between Sir Stafford and the parties in India on this visit, but was to be left over to be unravelled by the Viceroy if the offer had proved in other ways acceptable.

In a letter to Cripps dated 10 April, 1942, Azad, writing on behalf of Congress, rejected the "offer." The pith of the letter was contained in the following sentences:

"We cannot undertake responsibilities when we are not given the freedom and power to shoulder them effectively and when an old environment continues which hampers the national effort. . . . We are prepared to put aside for the present all questions about the future, though, as we have indicated, we hold definite views about it. But in the present the National Government must be a Cabinet Government with full power, and must not merely be a continuance of the Viceroy's Executive Council."

On 11 April the Congress Working Committee issued a resolution covering a wider field in its rejection of the offer. A passage in this which was to have importance in subsequent negotiations read as follows:

"The acceptance beforehand of the novel principle of non-accession for a Province is a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity, and an apple of discord likely to generate growing trouble in the Provinces. . . . Congress has been wedded to Indian freedom and unity and any break of that unity . . . would be exceedingly painful to contemplate. Nevertheless, the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will."

After the announcement of the rejection by Congress, the Muslim League Working Committee issued a resolution which also turned down the offer, and the mission of Sir Stafford Cripps came to an end.

On 19 April an article appeared in *Harijan* over Gandhi's signature, entitled: "That ill-fated Proposal," in the course of which he

used these words: "It is a thousand pities that the British Government should have sent a proposal for dissolving the political deadlock which, on the face of it, was too ridiculous to find acceptance anywhere," and a little later, referring to Sir Stafford Cripps, he said: "He should have known that at least the Congress would not look at Dominion status, even though it carried the right of secession."

It will be remembered that Winston Churchill, in announcing on 11 March in the House of Commons the dispatch of the Cripps Mission, had expressly stated that one of its objects was to "convince all classes, races and creeds in India" of Britain's sincerity. But in fact both the offer itself and the subsequent debate in Parliament on the return of Cripps had precisely the opposite effect on Gandhi; he became more firmly convinced than ever that the British had no intention of voluntarily giving freedom to India, and that they must be induced under pressure to concede it. The conception of the slogan "Quit India" (addressed to the British) began to take shape in his mind, and was developed in a succession of articles in his paper *Harijan*.

At first he was disposed to include in this the physical withdrawal of all elements of the British Raj, including the British troops. Their disappearance would be accompanied by the disbandment of the Indian army. This would leave India free to carry out in its purity his conception of non-violent non-cooperation with the Japanese. He found, however, great opposition to this idea in quarters that he could not altogether ignore. He had had conversations recently with Chiang Kai-shek during his stay in India, and he was made aware that the Government of China would view most unfavourably the termination by India of the active struggle against the Japanese armed forces. American war correspondents convinced him that the reaction in the United States would be such as to lose India the sympathy of large sections of people in their country, whose moral support was of great value to India in her agitation for freedom from British domination. Indian statesmen, including his old and trusted friend Rajagopalachari, urged upon him the dangers of an interregnum in India with no effective Government in control of the country. Gandhi, therefore, with some reluctance, conceded that

British troops might be allowed to remain, provided that it was so agreed by the new Indian administration.

But what were to be the means by which the British were to be induced against their will to "quit India" even in this modified sense? There was only one way. Limited *satyagraha* had not brought about the desired result. The time had now come when the mass civil disobedience which he had so long sought to avoid must be put into operation.

The Mahatma's penetrating mind did not allow him to deceive himself as to the result. It would be rebellion. So long as he was able to control it, it would be non-violent, though not merely symbolic as in the 1940 phase. But he recognized that there were people on the fringe of Congress, and even some Congress members, who might resort to violence. If so, it could not be helped. Equally, it was of no use pretending that the campaign would not embarrass the Government. But the situation was so perilous, and was likely to get so much worse if things were allowed to drift on in the way they were now doing, that it was necessary, he felt, to apply a drastic remedy to free India at once and enable her to face Japanese aggression in her own way.

Congress came broadly into line with this policy, though there were some resignations, including that of Rajagopalachari. On 14 July, 1942, a resolution was carried by the Working Committee calling for the withdrawal of British power from India and, if that were not complied with, threatening to utilize all the non-violent strength available for vindication of political rights and liberty. The struggle would be under Gandhi's leadership. On 8 August the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay endorsed this policy and sanctioned "the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale." Gandhi had announced that there would be a short interval between the passage of this resolution and its implementation under his instructions. During this interval he would contact the Government of India, but it would not be with the intention (so he was reported to have told the journalists) of further negotiation, the time for which had now passed.

The Government decided, however, not to give time for any further preparation of the campaign of mass disobedience. On

9 August it arrested Gandhi and other prominent members of Congress. The provincial Congress Committees (except the N.W.F.P.) were declared illegal bodies. Shortly afterwards rebellion broke out. It was on an extensive scale. It included acts of sabotage and personal violence. Terrorists and dacoits and many other persons not connected with Congress joined it in pursuit of their own ends. There was loss of life and considerable destruction of property. In parts of the country the disturbances took a very grave turn and were only with difficulty suppressed.

Gandhi's detention was in the Aga Khan's Palace at Poona, and it lasted for a year and three-quarters. After the first few weeks he was allowed to have newspapers and to see private visitors, but not to meet his political associates nor to enter into a correspondence with Jinnah with a view to an interview between them. On the last day of 1942 he wrote a letter couched in friendly terms to Lord Linlithgow, in which he protested against the assumption that he and the Congress were responsible for the violence of the rebellion, and asked either that he should be convinced of error, or that he and the Congress leaders should be exonerated of the charge; in the meanwhile he was considering undertaking a fast. Lord Linlithgow replied in an equally friendly letter, but frankly said that he felt obliged to hold Gandhi and Congress responsible for what had taken place, and asked for indications that he wished to retrace his steps. After further interchange of letters in which no progress towards agreement was reached, the correspondence ended with a letter from Gandhi, written on 7 February, 1943, in which he announced that his fast would begin on 9 February. It actually began on the following morning, 10 February.

Meanwhile, the long promised "Indianization" of the Viceroy's Executive Council had been effected, and thenceforward, though neither Congress nor the Muslim League had accepted seats upon it, all but three of its members were Indians of repute. It was this Executive which in February, 1943, had to face the very grave responsibility of what was to be done by the Government of India with regard to Gandhi's fast. Should he be released, or should the fast be allowed to run the course of three weeks which Gandhi himself had announced as its duration? After full and careful discussion they

decided on the latter course, but subsequently three members resigned from the Council as a consequence. Gandhi himself had explained from the beginning that he was not engaged on a hunger strike, but on a fast according to capacity to "crucify the flesh by fasting." He hoped to survive it. He had also stated that as his stomach could not now stand continual draughts of plain water, he would be taking fruit juice. The fast was watched with deep anxiety, not merely by Congress circles, but throughout the whole of India. At first, Gandhi's health stood up well to the ordeal, but as days passed into weeks he grew weaker and his doctors feared that the worst might happen. But fortunately his strong constitution, supported by his life of ascetic simplicity, stood him in good stead, and to the unbounded relief of everyone he reached 3 March without fatal consequences, and broke his fast then as he had always said he intended.

During the first half of 1943 the number of Congress prisoners rose to a maximum of some thirty-six thousand, including both those who had been convicted and those who were detained without trial on security grounds. Thereafter, the number of releases exceeded the new imprisonments, and the total of those imprisoned gradually declined.

A terrible disaster overtook Bengal in the late autumn and winter months of that year, in the shape of a famine which afflicted most acutely Calcutta and the surrounding *mofussil*. According to the findings of the subsequent Famine Enquiry Commission, no less than 1,500,000 people lost their lives either directly from starvation or from consequent diseases. However much the prime cause was the failure of the harvest, blame attached, it held, to the successive Governments of the province and to the Central Government for their lack of foresight, for failing to take adequate precautionary measures and to deal with inflation. One of the first acts of Lord Wavell, on becoming Viceroy in place of Lord Linlithgow, was to utilize the British Army to help to stay the ravages of the famine, and his intervention was greatly appreciated.

The political set-up in Bengal was unique. In that province Hindu and Muslim communities existed side-by-side, with only a slight numerical preponderance of the latter. Representative government

had never ceased to function, and Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin had recently become Prime Minister in place of Mr. Fazl-ul-Huq, who had headed a succession of Ministries ever since 1937. Of Nazimuddin's 138 supporters, 81 were members of the Muslim League, 25 constituted the European group and 19 belonged to the Scheduled Caste Party. The orthodox Congress group constituted the bulk of the Opposition of 99. In the Punjab, which, like Bengal, was also to contribute a tragic chapter to later history, there was a triangular division of communities—Muslim, Hindu and Sikh—and a "Unionist" Government had continued to function, headed in succession by Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan and Khizr Hyat Khan, both Muslims and both deliberately remaining outside the Muslim League.

In the Central Assembly of India the group of congressmen taking part in the proceedings steadily increased during the spring of 1944. On 27 February a meeting of the party in the Central Assembly regularized their position and accorded them the blessing of Bhulabhai Desai and of the Working Committee (in the person of Mrs. Naidu). It was noteworthy that frequently they cooperated with the Muslim group to oppose the Government, which out of nineteen divisions in the Chamber won eight and lost eleven. The most important defeat was over the budget, by a majority of one (56 against 55). Desai took his stand on the maxim "no taxation without representation," and refused to take the responsibility for finding the taxes without the privilege of directing their expenditure.

Lord Wavell delivered his first public speech as Viceroy on 17 February, 1944. After dealing with the need to drive the enemy from the gates of India and to secure a stable control of food supplies, he spoke of the economic and political future of the country. He welcomed the recent proposals for a fifteen-year plan for social and industrial development. He defined Great Britain's goal for India as "a prosperous country, a united country, enjoying complete and unqualified self-government as a willing partner of the British Commonwealth." The Cripps offer stood. As to the main difference between Hindus and Muslims, "you cannot," he said, "alter geography. From the point of view of defence, of relations with the outside world, of many internal and external problems, India is a natural unit. What arrangements you decide to make for two great communities and



certain other important minorities, as well as the Indian States, to live within that unit and to make the best use of its wealth and opportunities is for Indians to decide."

The twenty-second of February, 1944, saw the separation by death of the companion who had shared the Mahatma's fortunes for upwards of sixty years. Kasturba Gandhi was indeed a remarkable woman, and she had proved herself not merely a dutiful helpmeet but a resolute counsellor to her husband. Throughout their long life she had borne with him the strain of his political activities and, ever since their arrest in 1942, had shared his imprisonment in the Aga Khan's Palace. Her death in detention aroused deep and widespread feeling throughout India and tributes were paid to her memory at the gathering of some hundred friends in the grounds of the Palace, where the funeral rites were carried out. A fund was raised to be devoted to the promotion of the advancement and welfare of women and children throughout the rural areas, without religious discrimination.

Not very long after his wife's death, Gandhi himself contracted malaria and his health gradually showed signs of deteriorating. Acting on the report of the doctors attending him as to his serious condition, the Government of India, with the concurrence of His Majesty's Government, decided to release him on 6 May, 1944. The whole period of his detention had thus been exactly one year and nine months. His release was acclaimed with satisfaction by all sections throughout India, but the satisfaction was tempered by the recognition, when it became known, that the serious condition of his health was a reality.

Only a very short interval of convalescence intervened before the indomitable Mahatma, already in his seventy-fifth year, was taking the field once again. First, he set out on a lengthy defence of his activities in 1942. Next, he made a new approach to the Viceroy on the relations between Britain and India. Finally, he had interviews with Jinnah to endeavour to obtain a mutual accommodation as to Pakistan. On both of these two latter enterprises he had the active support of Rajagopalachari, who had been ploughing a lonely furrow since his exclusion from Congress in 1942. Rajaji had not seen eye to eye with his colleagues then, owing to his more favourable

attitude towards the Cripps offer and his willingness to make concessions to Jinnah. He had secured the passage of resolutions in the Madras Committee of Congress in favour of his ideas, and had continued to propagate them in spite of Congress displeasure. He had visited Gandhi in prison in April, 1943, and secured his consent to an approach to Jinnah. In the present year, 1944, he had laid before Jinnah suggested terms; but things had not advanced appreciably towards agreement. He now found that Gandhi would be willing to see Jinnah himself. The salient parts of the suggested basis were as follows:

"After the termination of the war a commission shall be appointed for demarcating contiguous districts in the N.W. and E. of India wherein the Muslim population is in absolute majority. In the areas thus demarcated, a plebiscite of all the inhabitants, held on the basis of adult suffrage or other practicable franchise, shall ultimately decide the issue of separation from Hindustan. If the majority decide in favour of forming a Sovereign State separate from Hindustan, such decision shall be given effect to, without prejudice to the right of districts on the border to choose to join either State."

The proposal was subject to the willingness of the Muslim League to cooperate with the Congress in the formation of a provisional interim Government for the transitional period, and the terms would only be binding in case of transfer by Britain of full power and responsibility for the governance of India. In the event of separation, mutual agreements would be entered into for safeguarding defence and commerce and communications, and for other purposes considered essential.

In allowing Rajagopalachari to put these terms before Jinnah, and in expressing his willingness himself to negotiate with Jinnah on this basis, Gandhi had gone a long way towards recognition of the principle of Pakistan. As was only to be expected, therefore, the publication of the terms created a big sensation in India. Moderate opinion generally welcomed the prospect of a settlement, but many Hindu elements vigorously dissented, and the Sikhs, who saw a threat to their position in the Punjab, were hostile. No authoritative pronouncement by Congress was possible, because most of the

Working Committee were still in prison, and whether Gandhi could have carried Congress with him will ever remain in doubt because, as will be seen below, the conversations never materialized in agreement.

Meanwhile, Gandhi was writing to the Viceroy his ideas as to the settlement of the difference between Congress and the British Raj. In a letter dated 27 July he wrote:

"I am prepared to advise the Working Committee to declare that, in view of changed conditions, mass civil disobedience envisaged by the resolution of August, 1942, cannot be offered, and that full cooperation in the war effort should be given by Congress if a declaration of immediate Indian independence is made and a National Government responsible to the Central Assembly be formed, subject to the proviso that, during the pendency of the war, the military operations should continue as at present without involving any financial burden on India."

It will be noted that, apart from the financial proposal at the end, which apparently would have shifted the whole cost of the defence of India from Indian to British shoulders, the main terms were not very likely to be acceptable either to the Muslims, who were, of course, in a minority in the Central Assembly, or to the British Government, who at the time of the Cripps offer had specifically rejected the idea of the grant of full power to an interim Government. The Viceroy, in a letter dated 15 August, 1944, definitely rejected them.

The meeting between Gandhi and Jinnah actually took place in September, and the conversations lasted for a fortnight. All politically minded India awaited the outcome with breathless interest, for it is no exaggeration to say that the future history of the Peninsula hung upon it. Had they been able to reach agreement and to secure the acceptance of it by their followers, the unhappy events that subsequently marred the transference of power from British to Indian hands would almost certainly never have taken place.

It might have been supposed that Gandhi and Jinnah were ideally fitted to carry on negotiations with one another. Both of them were known to be men of the highest personal integrity. Both of them carried immense weight in their respective camps. Both of them knew



*(LEFT) Gandhi conducts a prayer meeting in the Sweepers' Colony, Delhi, and (RIGHT) Vallabhbhai Patel leads Gandhi to the speaker's platform*



*Burmese Ministers visit Gandhi at New Delhi*



*Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Gandhi share a joke in New Delhi, 1946*

precisely what they wanted. Both of them were prepared to make concessions to reach a final settlement. Both of them were lawyers who would naturally understand the niceties of words and their full significance.

Nevertheless, Gandhi and Jinnah were poles apart, and the hope of agreement between them was from the outset exceedingly slender. Each man recognized in the other a sworn enemy of his most cherished ideals. To Gandhi, whose passion for the unity of India was second only to that for its liberation from British domination, Jinnah was the arch-priest of the "two-nation" theory. To Jinnah, who regarded Congress as a Hindu organization and every Muslim who belonged to it as a blackleg and a traitor, Gandhi was a seducer of the faithful. Gandhi's relationship to Congress (neither exactly in nor exactly out) was a thorn in the flesh to Jinnah. Was Gandhi a principal or an agent? In Jinnah's view he was neither. He was a sort of friend of the family. If he (Jinnah) made a bargain with him, what would happen to it when made? Gandhi, on his part, felt that he had made the big concession in accepting Rajagopalachari's formula as the basis of discussion, and it was now Jinnah's turn to come some way to meet him.

These, admittedly, were the outstanding objective differences between the two men, but behind lay more subtle differences, less easily definable. In modern jargon, they were allergic to one another. Gandhi found Jinnah cold and unresponsive. Jinnah never knew when the saint in Gandhi was transmogrified into the astute lawyer and politician.

In the event, there was a failure to reach agreement. The reasons for the breakdown can be gathered from the correspondence which passed between them in the intervals of the talks. The main points of difference centred round (1) the suggestion that the framing of the constitution should be postponed until after British power had been withdrawn, which Jinnah felt would expose Muslims without protection to a Hindu majority; (2) the communal composition of the provisional Government, on which Jinnah claimed equality for the Muslim League with Congress; (3) the areas (instead of provinces) likely to be demarcated as Pakistan; and (4) the proposal to take a plebiscite of the population. The breakdown was not unwelcome to

extremists on both sides, who had feared that their position might be compromised by an agreement.

In the autumn of 1944, Sir Tej Sapru and his fellow Liberals set up a committee for preparing a constitution. Gandhi was cooperative, but Jinnah declined to have anything to do with it on the ground that he was not interested in making one constitution for India but wanted two constitutions—one for Hindu India and the other for Muslim India ("Pakistan"). In its report, published in the spring of 1945, the committee recommended a federal India, with or without the Princes, and a single non-communal franchise. The ultimate constitution-making body was to have equal numbers on it of Hindus and Muslims, and, if the Muslims were prepared to agree to the substitution throughout of joint electorates, the Hindus should respond by granting parity in the Union Legislature. For the scheduled castes and the lesser minorities the committee suggested the establishment of minority commissions to watch over their interests. For the interim period, the committee proposed that India should forthwith be treated as a Dominion, that Section 93 proclamations should be withdrawn and that popular Ministries should resume office with coalition Ministries, and that at the centre a National Government should replace the Viceroy's Executive. Not only the Muslim League, but the Hindu *Mahasabha* and the scheduled castes expressed disapproval of the report, and nothing more was done about it. Nevertheless, it clarified the issue and promoted discussion of solutions, some of which were to be embodied in later schemes.

In January, 1945, conversations took place between Bhulabhai Desai and Liaquat Ali Khan regarding the possibility of an agreement between Congress and the Muslim League as to forming an interim Central Government. The agreement laid down that the composition of this Government would be on the following lines:

(1) Equal numbers of persons nominated by the Congress and the League.

(2) Representatives of minorities (in particular scheduled castes and the Sikhs).

(3) The Commander-in-Chief.

The agreement further provided that the Government be formed and function within the framework of the existing Government of

India Act, but that the reserved powers of the Governor-General should not be resorted to to override the Legislative Assembly. Another clause laid down that one of the first steps of such an interim Government would be to release the Working Committee members of the Congress.

Documents embodying these terms were signed by both parties to the conversations, though it was made clear that neither Congress nor the Muslim League were committed to them. Nevertheless, the important position held by the participants in their respective organizations, and the knowledge that Desai had been in touch with Gandhi, gave them a significance of more than a personal character. For the time being there was no publication, and it was not until the following September that they were actually made known.

In the meantime the Viceroy himself decided to take the initiative. With the full concurrence and active support of the Coalition Government in Britain, whom he went specially to London to consult, Lord Wavell issued invitations to all the principal Indian parties to meet him in conference in Simla. The members of the Working Committee of Congress who were still in detention were released. The conference was composed of the following: The premiers of provinces where representative government still obtained (these included Khizr Hyat Khan of the Punjab, and Dr. Khan Sahib of the North-West Frontier), ex-premiers of provinces now under Section 93 (including Rajagopalachari and Nazimuddin), Jinnah, Azad, Desai, Liaquat Ali Khan, Sivaraj of the scheduled castes, Master Tara Singh of the Sikhs and some others. Gandhi, though not a member of the conference, was present at Simla during its continuance, and of course played a leading part in all the negotiations.

The essential feature of the scheme was a complete reorganization of the Viceroy's Executive Council in a form that it was hoped would be generally acceptable. With the exception of the Viceroy himself and the Commander-in-Chief, all official participation was to disappear. The Indians were to be representatives of their parties, and there was to be a Hindu-Muslim parity. The final selection of personnel was to be made by the Viceroy, but he would exercise his choice from among names submitted to him by the parties. Though it would still be called the Viceroy's Executive Council, it would



approximate to an interim National Government and the Viceroy's veto would be used sparingly, and generally for the sole purpose of protecting the rights of minorities.

All the parties accepted the scheme in principle, and the conference, in its earlier stages, made substantial progress towards agreement. Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee went so far as to send in to the Viceroy a panel of names. But just as it seemed that a positive step forward was to be taken, a divergence which had always lain in the background leapt into the forefront of the picture. What precise meaning was to be attached to the phrase "Hindu-Muslim parity"? Did it mean parity between adherents of the Muslim and Hindu faiths or parity between the Muslim League and the Congress? Gandhi claimed that Congress was not a sectional but a national body, including leading Muslims like Maulana Azad, the Congress President; it could not, therefore, forgo its right to nominate and have selected at least one of the Muslim members of the Executive. Jinnah claimed that the Muslim League was the official spokesman of the Muslims, and as such had the exclusive right to nominate the Muslim contingent; even so he would be in a minority in the Council, because of the representatives of the lesser parties, who would tend generally to vote with the Hindu element against him. On this rock the conference foundered, and this last effort of the British Coalition<sup>1</sup> Government, in conjunction with the Viceroy, to solve "the Indian problem" came to an end.

<sup>1</sup> During Lord Wavell's visit to London the British Coalition Government had given place to the Conservative "Caretaker" Government, and this remained in being during the conference at Simla.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE CABINET MISSION OF 1946

**I**DEAS AND EVENTS are the twin poles around which all cosmic existence turns. To ignore either is to misinterpret history and to fail to prepare for the future. Throughout the world during Gandhi's life ideas evolved and events occurred of far-reaching consequence to mankind. To both, he made notable contributions.

When Gandhi was born, three dominations of long standing shackled the freedom of humanity. They were in the realms of class, sex and race. Evidence of the first was to be found in every country where society was divided sharply into the rich and the poor. The industrial revolution, with its potentiality of plenty, had not obliterated this separation. On the contrary, it had exaggerated the contrast between the "haves" and the "have nots" and had increased the subservience of the proletariat to their masters. Only a few advanced thinkers in all classes recognized how fundamentally wrong this was. But the idea was to grow, and the struggle for emancipation was to be maintained until men came to speak of the twentieth as the "century of the common man." Both in propagating the idea and in direct support to the workers in their fight in India to better their lot, Gandhi had taken an active, and often a decisive, part.

The "Subjection of Women" had been the theme of one of the most famous of the books of John Stuart Mill, and when, some forty years ago, the campaign for votes for women took a militant form in Great Britain, Gandhi had followed it with intense interest. Through his influence and that of others who shared his views, women secured, from the first, equal voting rights with men in the various franchises which were set up in India for electoral purposes.

But it was race domination to which Gandhi had devoted his most passionate opposition. Some of the white races of Europe claimed

superiority as a matter of inherent right over the coloured peoples of Asia and Africa. To Gandhi this was an offence against human dignity, and his life was an expression of his active and determined protest against it. That is why he had never been particularly interested in limited concessions, in partial self-government, in seats for Indians on the Viceroy's Executive Council, or in commissions for Indian officers in the British-controlled Indian army. That is why he had coined the phrase "Quit India" to express, not so much the physical withdrawal of British personnel from the soil of India, as the disappearance, lock, stock and barrel, of British overlordship.

By an irony it was the Second World War, so hated by Gandhi, that finally sealed the doom of all these dominations. Not only in the national armies had privilege of class had to give way to merit in obtaining promotion, but in civilian life also class began to fade out; and when post-war elections were held in Europe the parties of social equality were almost everywhere successful. Equally, it was in the war that women finally demonstrated beyond dispute their bravery, their capacity and the indispensability of their service; so that their claim to equality of status was, at its end, universally admitted, even though its translation into concrete shape lagged conspicuously behind. Finally, it was in the events during and arising out of the war that Asia secured her release from European domination.

Many factors contributed to this result. The sweeping victories of Japan on land and sea and in the air, even though finally reversed by the Allies in combination, demonstrated that an Asian people were a match for the best forces that Europe could bring against them. The courage and resource of the two million Indian volunteers who fought so brilliantly in support of the Allies proved that the races of India had not lost the martial prowess for which they were renowned of old. The complete absorption of Britain in the war had led to the suspension of the recruitment of British personnel to the Indian civil services, with the result that at its end there was a dearth of young men qualified to take the place of the old, experienced civil servants when they should come to retire. The doggedness and the scale of Indian opposition to cooperation, even when it seemed that the two countries were engaged in a common struggle against foreign aggression, had not passed unnoticed in the United Kingdom or in

the self-governing Dominions. Finally, promises had been made to Indians during the war, designed to enlist their support, and now that the war was over those promises had to be fulfilled.

In consequence of these and other factors, while in India the numbers of the politically conscious who demanded freedom from British rule had steadily increased, in Britain the numbers of those who wanted to resist it had grown fewer and were confined now to a minority only of one out of the three parties of the State. When, therefore, the general election of July, 1945, in Great Britain registered a big swing to the left, there is no doubt that there was an overwhelming majority of opinion in Britain in favour of handing over to Indians the governance of their country under a constitution of their own choice. Any government of the left in Britain which, instead, had involved the country in a head-on collision with politically minded India would have been given short shrift.

It is perhaps not surprising that neither Gandhi nor the majority of Congress members were fully aware of the strength of this feeling in Britain. After all, most of them had only recently been released from detention, and their contacts were not with the British in Britain but with the British Raj in India, whose servants had carried out its orders to oppose and restrain their agitation when it took illegal and subversive forms. Moreover, experience had convinced Indian politicians that the Government of India supplied an apposite illustration of the French proverb that "the more things change, the more they remain the same." In other words, British governments might come and go, British promises might even be honoured in the letter, but the British Raj in India would see to it that "jam tomorrow" never materialized for Indians as "jam today." The Congress organization had in any case to be rebuilt and strengthened to meet all eventualities, for, as Gandhi saw clearly, there is a sense in which freedom can never be bestowed; it must always be wrested from authority by those who demand it and mean to use it.

A glance may now be taken at the situation as it appeared to the new Labour Government in Britain, and to myself who had been appointed as the new Secretary of State. In face of our determination to emancipate India from British rule and to bring into being complete self-government on democratic lines, we were confronted with

political deadlock. Gandhi had lost faith in British intentions about Indian freedom. Jinnah had lost faith in fair treatment for Muslims at the hands of a Hindu majority. We realized no less clearly than Gandhi that this deadlock was inducing a growing feeling of frustration and bitterness, and that it had to be broken at the earliest possible moment. In its place had to be instilled hope and confidence and a way had to be found to reach a final settlement. But how best to bring this about, so as to carry the maximum of acceptance by all sections of opinion in India, was not by any means so obvious as to some people it seemed.

One way that was suggested was to make a complete break with the policy of all previous British Governments along broadly the following lines: All prisoners convicted of crimes directly or remotely connected with political agitation, including capital crime, to have their sentences remitted or substantially reduced. Immediate jail delivery to be effected of all persons detained for security reasons without trial. A free pardon (with reinstatement in the Indian Army) to be given to all ex-officers and men who had joined the Japanese forces and fought against the Allies. Representative ministries to be set up again forthwith in all those provinces which the Governors were administering under Section 93 of the Act of 1935. The Viceroy's Executive Council to be replaced by an interim "national government" representative of the main parties in India, with the same freedom from control as that enjoyed by Dominion governments in the British Commonwealth. A Constituent Assembly to be convened forthwith to frame a constitution for an independent India.

By enumerating this list of items I must not be taken to imply that any such programme was actually submitted to us by Gandhi or by any other of the leaders of Congress in India. They consist of suggestions that were made to us from time to time, by friends of Indian self-government, as to what would be most likely to impress public opinion in India with the good faith of the new British Government towards Indian aspirations. Naturally, as such, they were all most carefully considered. But in the end they were found to be unacceptable, without substantial modification, for the following reasons.

In the first place, it is important to realize that India never had been, nor could be, "governed from Whitehall." Administration

of so vast an area as this must be carried out on the spot. Not only so, but even decisions on policy had always rested primarily on the Government of India. It is true, of course, that the British Parliament was the ultimate authority, and that under the India Acts the Secretary of State was possessed of wide powers. But any holder of the office who had chosen to use these powers drastically (to override the Executive and the Judiciary) would have run counter to the spirit of the constitution and have found himself in serious difficulty.

Moreover, apart from constitutional propriety, there appeared to His Majesty's Government to be grave intrinsic defects in the suggestions. Precipitate and wholesale releases of convicted and security prisoners would set free not only genuine high-minded political men and women, but also many dangerous persons whose association with politics was shadowy or non-existent. If, as a result, public disorder broke out or there were a serious increase in individual crime, the demand for a reversal of policy would be irresistible. It was much wiser, therefore, in our opinion to have each case carefully reviewed on merit before release was decided upon. That meant delay and a loss of the glamour attaching to a general declaration of amnesty, but that was better than subsequent retreat from a too-hasty advance.

The question of the members of what came to be called the Indian National Army was a particularly difficult one, because the officers and men who composed it ranged from those who were alleged to have been guilty of crimes of savagery against their own compatriots fighting in the Allied forces, down to those who under *force majeure* failed to remain loyal to their military oath. Technically all were deserters and mutineers, and as such liable to the extreme penalty. But only rigid disciplinarians would seek to enforce it against those who had collaborated with the enemy only up to the point necessary to avoid maltreatment. Even those who had collaborated fully had in some cases done so in the belief that they were assisting in the liberation of their country. It seemed right, therefore, that while none could be reinstated except the really innocent, proceedings by court martial should be instituted against only those charged with crimes against members of the Allied Forces.

On the strictly political issues it seemed to us that the essential prerequisite of any advance was to hold fresh elections both for the

centre and for the provinces, of which there had been none since 1937. Only so could the true political alignment be ascertained and a basis laid down on which the superstructure of representative ministries, interim central government and constitution-making bodies could be erected. Unfortunately, while the elections for the Central Legislative Assembly could be held before the year ran out, those for the provincial legislatures could not take place until the spring of 1946. The delay was regrettable but, for administrative reasons, unavoidable; even so, the franchise was much too restricted, but it could not be widened without new legislation and still greater delay. On 21 August, 1945, this policy was made public and an announcement was simultaneously made that Lord Wavell was coming immediately to London to consult with His Majesty's Government on future developments.

A month later he was back in India, and a statement was put out on 19 September expressing the intention of His Majesty's Government and the Viceroy immediately after the elections (1) to invite the resumption of ministerial responsibility in the provinces; (2) to convene a constitution-making body; and (3) to reconstitute the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Gandhi made no public pronouncement with regard to this statement, but there were signs that it modified somewhat his deep-rooted conviction that no British government would ever of its own volition give real power to Indians to order their own affairs. Other leaders of Congress henceforth devoted their main energies to the immense task of contesting the elections. But throughout the rank and file of Congress supporters the tension was by no means abated. On the contrary, as week after week went by and many Congress men and women still remained in detention, and no positive step was taken to achieve even an interim solution in the shape of a representative government at the centre, bitterness increased and the extreme element advocated revolutionary tactics.

In order to try to dissipate this impatience and to acquaint India with the overwhelming body of opinion in Britain favourable to a big advance, the Cabinet decided to send out a parliamentary delegation representative of all parties. The visit took place in January and February, 1946. The delegation as a whole had talks with both

Gandhi and Jinnah and were interviewed by the Press. They broke up into sections and travelled north, south, east and west, making contact with leaders of thought of all Indian parties. In this way they learnt a great deal about Indian politics which was to prove of use to themselves and to their parliamentary colleagues after their return. But Indian bitterness remained unabated. "More talk and enquiry and no action" was the verdict of most of the Congress members.

Moreover, the acerbities of the election campaign raised the temperature of the communal strife. For the Muslim League not unnaturally made the creation of Pakistan their main election platform, while Congress advocated a United India. The translation of this hostility into physical violence by the uneducated masses was, however, sternly rebuked by Gandhi and other prominent Congress leaders. The Sikhs, mainly concentrated in the Punjab, formed another element of unrest, and were not without divisions in their own ranks. Though they were not disposed to throw in their lot unreservedly with either of the major communities, their particular fear was that they would be brought under Muslim domination in the event of Pakistan becoming a reality. The scheduled castes went into the elections under two rival banners—one in association with Congress and the other, under Ambedkar, in opposition to it.

On 19 February, 1946, it was announced in the British Parliament that a mission consisting of three Cabinet ministers would shortly proceed to India in order, in association with the Viceroy, to discuss with leaders of Indian opinion the framing of a constitution. In a debate on 15 March, on the eve of the departure of the mission, the Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, used the following phrases:

"India must choose what will be her future constitution. I hope that the Indian people may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth. I am certain that she will find great advantages in doing so. . . . But if she does so elect, it must be by her own free will. The British Commonwealth and Empire is not bound together by chains of external compulsion. It is a free association of free peoples. If, on the other hand, she elects for independence, in our view she has a right to do so. . . . I am well aware, when I speak of India, that I speak of a country containing a congeries



## LAST YEARS

of races, religions and languages. . . . We are very mindful of the rights of minorities, and minorities should be able to live free from fear. On the other hand, we cannot allow a minority to place a veto on the advance of the majority."

M.P.s of all parties present in the House took part in the discussion, and showed remarkable unanimity in support of the Prime Minister's statement.

The three Cabinet ministers who had been selected to undertake the mission thus widely endorsed were Stafford Cripps, Albert Alexander and myself. Cripps was, of course, well acquainted with Gandhi and other Indian leaders. My friendship with Gandhi was of long standing. Some thirty years previously he had lunched with my wife and myself in our flat in London, and had described to us his South African experiences and the active and important part he had played there in fighting for the status of his fellow Indians. In the cold weather of 1926-27 my wife and I had met him again in India, when we attended the annual meeting of Congress in Gauhati. In 1931 I had sat with him on the Round Table Conference and on its Federal Structure Committee, held in St. James's Palace. Since then we had had some personal correspondence, and he had had my good wishes on his birthday, which happened to be the same day of the year as my wedding day. Alexander, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty (later Minister of Defence), had not hitherto had any direct contact with Indian problems or personalities, but was no doubt selected by the Prime Minister as a man of sound broad judgment in touch with British public opinion generally.

In the elections for the Central Legislative Assembly held at the end of 1945, Congress and the Muslim League had between them secured the bulk of the 102 seats. Congress had obtained 57 seats, including all the "general" seats, and the Muslim League all the 30 seats reserved for Muslims. In the provincial elections, held in the spring of 1946, results followed in the main the same pattern, but in the North-West Frontier Province Congress won all the "general" seats and a majority of the seats reserved for Muslims, while in the Punjab, though the Muslim League increased its representation to 79 at the expense of the Unionists, it did not gain an absolute majority, and a coalition government under Malik Khizr Hyat Khan

continued to function with the support of Unionists, Congress and Sikhs.

The Cabinet Mission arrived in New Delhi on 24 March, 1946, and then without delay began its work by interviewing leading representatives of the main political parties. Maulana Azad represented the Congress and Jinnah the Muslim League. These interviews were followed by interviews with representatives of the Indian States, led by the Nawab of Bhopal; of the Sikhs; of both sections of the scheduled castes, one of which was led by Dr. Ambedkar and the other represented those members of the scheduled castes who adhered to Congress; representatives of the government party and of the opposition party in the newly elected legislatures of the principal provinces; representatives of labour and of women's organizations. Gandhi travelled especially from the west of India to meet us, and at my request, in spite of the trying weather conditions in Delhi during the ensuing months, he remained in touch with us and with the Congress Working Committee during the whole progress of negotiations. At his own special wish he was accommodated in the *harijan* quarter. In addition to his official interviews with us, to which reference will be made later, he came frequently for "off the record" talks at the house where we stayed, and on one occasion he met me, by arrangement, in the course of his evening walk, so as to avoid the publicity which always attended his movements. In view of his unique position and his unequalled prestige among all classes in India, he was invited, at an early stage, to express his views to the mission.

The broad situation disclosed by the two main interviews was as follows: The Congress were not prepared to see India divided into two separate states, but they recognized that the government at the centre must be federal and that the provincial units must have a large measure of autonomy. Their proposal was that there should be a limited number of compulsory federal subjects, such as defence, foreign affairs and communications; for which all provinces must accede to the federation. All the residual subjects would be provincial, but there might be a list of optional subjects in respect of which provinces could, if they so decided, hand over their authority to the centre for common action. It should, in the view of Congress, be for a constituent assembly to frame a constitution of this general nature.

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The Muslim League, on the other hand, stood for a separate sovereign state of Pakistan. They demanded the prior recognition of this principle, and consequently the establishment of two separate constitution-making bodies. Once partition had been accepted, there was no reason why the utmost goodwill should not exist between the two states of Hindustan and Pakistan, or why treaties should not be negotiated between them providing for their common interests.

Gandhi made it clear at the outset that he was speaking entirely for himself and not expressing the opinions of the Congress. He was anxious, he said, in the first place, that the general political atmosphere should be improved by the immediate release of all political prisoners (whatever their offence) and by the removal of the salt tax. Secondly, he declared himself completely opposed to the two-nation theory on which Jinnah's claim for Pakistan was founded, though he accepted the idea of the independence of culture as a legitimate ambition. The Cabinet Mission would have to decide this main issue. In any case, there must be a considerable interim period before a new constitution came into force, and as to this Gandhi suggested that Jinnah be invited to form a central government to replace the Viceroy's Executive Council, with a free choice as to its personnel. This interim government would, however, be responsible to the Central Legislative Assembly. If Jinnah declined this proposal, the task should then be assigned to the Congress.

When these preliminary interviews were concluded the mission had a short recess, expressing the hope that the Indian parties would themselves, in the meantime, come together and offer a common plan of campaign. But when this was not forthcoming they issued a simultaneous invitation to Congress and the Muslim League to send four delegates each to meet them at Simla to discuss the possibility of a scheme for a constitution based upon the following fundamental principles:

A Union Government to deal with foreign affairs, defence and communications; two groups of provinces, one of the predominantly Hindu provinces and the other of the predominantly Muslim provinces, to deal with other subjects which the provinces in the respective groups desired to be dealt with in common; the provincial governments to have all the residuary sovereign

rights; the Indian states to take their appropriate place in this structure on terms to be negotiated with them.

This invitation was accepted, both sides stipulating that the acceptance did not imply agreement with this basis, but only a willingness to discuss it. The *pourparlers* duly took place at the Viceregal Lodge. Gandhi was not a delegate, but he came to Simla and was in daily contact with the Congress representatives, and had some private discussions with members of the mission. Considerable progress was made in the conference, so much so that it seemed at one time as if only a small difference separated the two sides, and Jinnah and Nehru were invited to meet one another to come to a final agreement.

Unfortunately, however, this was not achieved and the conference accordingly broke down; but friendly feelings were expressed and a mutual understanding was reached and loyally adhered to, that while the mission was adumbrating its own proposals the discussions at Simla should not be communicated to the Press and the best efforts should be made by both sides to induce the party papers to take a conciliatory line. While the conference was still sitting, the Viceroy commenced discussions on the possible composition and powers of an interim government at the centre.

On 16 May the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy issued a statement<sup>1</sup> which had been the subject of most careful deliberation and of consultation with His Majesty's Government. Gandhi had foreseen that some document would ultimately be issued, and had expressed his urgent hope that it would not be couched in the language of an award, but would take the form of a proposal to Indian parties. This was, in fact, in accordance with the realities of the situation, for it was impossible for the British Government, in the process of withdrawing its authority completely from India, to enforce conditions as to how subsequent authority there should be exercised. The statement, therefore, met Gandhi's wishes in this respect. The statement began with a recital of the facts as disclosed by the preliminary interviews, and an expression of opinion that neither the proposals of the Muslim League nor those of the Congress would meet the case, stating the considerations on which that conclusion was based. It proceeded

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 6821.

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to draw the outline of a constitution which all parties might be willing to accept.

It envisaged three tiers. At the top there would be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the states. This Union would deal with foreign affairs, defence and communications and have power to raise the finances requisite thereto. The Union would have an executive and a legislature, and in the latter any question raising a major communal issue would require a majority of the representatives of each of the two major communities.

The bottom tier would be occupied by the provinces and the states, in whom would vest all residuary powers.

The provinces would be free to form groups with executives and legislatures. Such groups, if formed, would constitute the intermediate tier and would determine the provincial subjects to be taken in common.

For the purpose of bringing some such constitution into being the statement recommended for acceptance the setting up of a constitution-making body. This would be elected by the members of the provincial legislatures. To each province would be allocated a number of representatives proportionate to the population of the province and voting would be by communities—general, Muslim and Sikh—the “general” to include all persons who were not either Muslims or Sikhs. The states would be invited to send representatives to the constitution-making body in numbers proportionate to their total population.

The procedure on the constitution-making body would be that after a preliminary meeting of the entire body, the provincial representatives would divide up into sections—Section “A” consisting of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa; Section “B” of the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Sindh; Section “C” of Bengal and Assam. These sections would settle the constitutions of the provinces in their section, and would also decide whether a group should be formed and, if so, with what subjects it should deal. Finally, the whole of the members of the constitution-making body should reassemble to settle the Union constitution.

The statement made also certain other recommendations: (1) Resolutions either changing the basis of the proposed constitution

or involving a major communal issue should not be accepted by the constitution-making body unless agreed to by each of the major communities. (2) After the constitution had come into operation, any province, by a vote of its legislature, would be free to opt out of the group in which it had been placed. Further, after ten years it could claim a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution. (3) On the attainment of independence by British India, paramountcy over the states would neither be retained by the British Crown nor transferred to the new government. (4) An Advisory Committee should be set up to report to the constitution-making body as to the rights of citizens, minorities and tribal and excluded areas, and how best these should be included in the constitution.

After making an appeal to all Indians to accept the proposals made to them so as to avoid the danger of violence and to secure a settlement by consent, the statement concluded with the following words:

"We hope that the new independent India may choose to be a member of the British Commonwealth. We hope, in any event, that you will remain in close and friendly association with our people. But these are matters for your own free choice. Whatever that choice may be, we look forward with you to your ever-increasing prosperity among the greatest nations of the world and to a future even more glorious than your past."

Gandhi's first reaction to this statement of 16 May was not only friendly but favourable. Speaking after his prayer meeting on 17 May he said that he considered that the Cabinet Mission had brought forth something of which they had every reason to be proud. Whatever the wrong done to India by British rule, if the statement of the mission was genuine, as he believed it was, it was in discharge of an obligation the British owed to India, namely, to get off India's back. It contained the seed to convert their land of sorrow into one without sorrow and suffering. On the following evening he said that it was his hope and prayer that the announcement of the Cabinet would be fully honoured in letter and in spirit.

This favourable reaction of Gandhi, striking a new note in his attitude to the British Government, was a most heartening response which encouraged a widespread hope in India and in Britain that a

way had been opened at last to bridge the divergent claims of Congress and the Muslim League and lead without further conflict between them to the freedom of India. This hope grew when Jinnah, after criticizing the statement for turning down his conception of a sovereign Pakistan, nevertheless induced the Muslim League, at its meeting on 5 June, to accept the basis of the scheme and to agree to cooperate in the proposed constitution-making machinery. Gandhi, however, and the Working Committee of Congress, determined to subject the statement to the closest scrutiny before reaching a definite decision to accept or reject it. Evidence of the way in which Gandhi's mind was working is provided by two important articles that appeared over his signature in *Harijan* on 26 May and 2 June. Concerning the statement he wrote on 26 May:

"After four days of searching examination . . . my conviction abides that it is the best document the British Government could have produced in the circumstances. . . .

"My compliment, however, does not mean that what is best from the British standpoint is also best or even good from the Indian. Their best may possibly be harmful. . . .

"It is an appeal and an advice. It has no compulsion in it. Thus the Provincial Assemblies may or may not elect the delegates. The delegates, having been elected, may or may not join the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly having met, may lay down a procedure different from the one laid down in the statement. Whatever is binding on any person or party arises out of the necessity of the situation. . . .

"Therefore, when Lord Pethick-Lawrence said to a Press correspondent, 'If they do come together on that basis, it will mean that they will have accepted that basis, but they can still change it, if by a majority of each party they desire to do so,' he was right in the sense that those who became delegates, well knowing the contents of the statement, were expected by the authors to abide by the basis, unless it was duly altered by the major parties. . . .

"This is perfect so far, but what about the units? Are the Sikhs, for whom the Punjab is the only home in India, to consider themselves, against their will, as part of the section which takes

in Sindh, Baluchistan and the Frontier Province? Or is the Frontier Province, also against its will, to belong to the Punjab, called 'B' in the statement, or Assam to 'C' although it is a predominantly non-Muslim province? In my opinion; the voluntary character of the statement demands that the liberty of the individual unit should be unimpaired. Any member of the sections is free to join it. The freedom to opt out is an additional safeguard."

Gandhi's article on 2 June was headed "Vital Defects." He enumerated three. The first was that the formation of a popular government at the centre should have preceded the issue of the statement. The second was that the question of paramountcy remained unsolved. It was not enough to say that it would end with the end of British rule in India. If it could not be ended with the establishment of the interim government, it should be exercised in cooperation with it and purely for the benefit of the people of the states. The third defect was the retention of the troops during the interim period. Their presence would act as a damper on the Constituent Assembly and would more likely than not be wanted even after the establishment of independence so-called. A nation that desired alien troops for its safety, internal or external, or had them imposed on it, could not be described as independent in any sense of the term.

As Gandhi anticipated, the Sikh community were displeased with the statement because they feared that in their homelands in the Punjab they would be subject to the Muslim majority in the North-West group. It was true that there was to be no sovereign Pakistan, but the grouping system seemed to them nearly as bad, and they refused to be comforted by the argument, put forward by the mission, that as they would nearly hold the balance between the Muslims and the Hindus in the Punjab, they would be wooed by both communities and would exercise, in consequence, a very large measure of political power.

Ambedkar, on behalf of the Scheduled Castes Federation, was equally emphatic in his opposition to the statement, pointing out that under the system of elections for provincial legislatures his organization was not represented in fair proportion to its numerical strength as compared with the body of scheduled castes controlled by Congress, with the result that his organization would have negligible, if any,



representation in the Constituent Assembly. He refused to admit that the provision of an Advisory Committee on the "rights of citizens, minorities and tribes" was any substitute for adequate representation on the main body.

Another community which expressed at this time intense dissatisfaction with the proposals was that of the Anglo-Indians; and Mr. Frank Anthony, their leader, protested in bitter terms against the treatment which the community had received.

The position of the Europeans was also the subject of much controversy. Gandhi took the view that as non-Indians, having no intention of making India their permanent home, they had no right to participate in framing the constitution, and that this was the clear intention of the statement construed as a whole. He published a legal opinion supporting this view. The point was one of substance not merely on ideological grounds. By the Act of 1935, Europeans had been accorded a "weightage" in the provincial legislatures out of all proportion to the numbers of their community. If this over-representation were to be reflected in the constitution-making body it might happen that in Section "C" (Bengal and Assam) their vote would turn the scale between Muslims and Hindus and decide the important issue as to whether or not a group should be formed in North-East India. This result, which certainly had not been foreseen by the Cabinet Mission in framing their proposals, was a source of considerable embarrassment to the community, and after some hesitation both the Bengal and Assam Europeans decided that they would abstain from any part in the elections. This decision pleased Congress but was resented by the Muslim League, who regarded it as a concession to Congress importunity.

The Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes, after full consideration, accepted the proposals in the statement of 16 May, as they found that they provided the necessary machinery for the attainment by India of independence, which they had throughout supported, and a fair basis for their own participation. They accordingly decided to elect a Negotiating Committee to settle the method of their representation in the Constituent Assembly, and they also appointed delegates to a committee to arrange matters of common concern to British India and the states.

Meanwhile, another shadow had arisen to cloud the relations between Congress and the Muslim League. The Cabinet Mission in their statement of 16 May had announced that the Viceroy had already started discussions with a view to forming an interim government in which all the portfolios, including that of the War Minister (hitherto held by the Commander-in-Chief), would be held by Indians having the full confidence of the people. Subsequently, the Viceroy, with the concurrence of His Majesty's Government and the mission, had said in a letter that though it was impossible to amend the Government of India Act so as to give to the interim government status or powers identical with those of a Dominion government, nevertheless His Majesty's Government would treat it "with the same close consultation and consideration" and accord to it "the greatest possible freedom in the exercise of the day-to-day administration of the country." Congress had seemed to regard this assurance as reasonably satisfactory.

But the composition of the interim government had still to be determined. The original proposals which Lord Wavell put to the Congress and the Muslim League were on the basis of five members of the Congress, five members of the Muslim League and two members representing the minorities. Subsequently, he proposed to add a member of the scheduled castes to be selected by Congress, and to have a convention by which all communal matters should be settled with the assent of Hindu and Muslim members voting separately. Congress took exception both to the composition and to the proposed convention. Days continued to pass by and the prospect of agreement, either on the long-term proposals of 16 May or on the formation of an interim government, still hung in the balance. The Congress Working Committee went into recess and carried Gandhi with them to Mussouri, in the hills. Rajagopalachari came up from Madras to Delhi to help in the negotiations. Jinnah gave the required fortnight's notice summoning his Working Committee to a meeting.

In order to bring matters to a head, the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy issued a statement on 16 June abandoning further negotiations for the interim government and announcing, instead, the issue of invitations to serve on it to a named list of fourteen persons. Of these, six were Hindu members of Congress (one being a member

of the scheduled castes), five were members of the Muslim League and three represented the minority communities of Sikhs, Indian Christians and Parsees. The following were important subsequent clauses of the statement:

If any of those invited is unable for personal reasons to accept, the Viceroy will after consultation invite some other person in his place.

(4) The Viceroy will arrange the distribution of portfolios in consultation with the leaders of the two major parties.

(5) The above composition of the interim government is in no way to be taken as a precedent for the solution of any other communal question. It is an expedient put forward to solve the present difficulty only, and to obtain the best available coalition government.

(8) In the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join in the setting up of a coalition government on the above lines, it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an interim government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the statement of 16 May.

No public pronouncement of any of the Indian parties was made immediately on this statement, nor were the invitations accepted by any representative of the League or Congress. Jinnah, who considered that he had been placed at a disadvantage by accepting the mission's statement of 16 May in advance of any decision by Congress, decided to reserve his decision on the 16 June statement until after Congress had spoken. The Congress Working Committee met daily, together with Gandhi, and debated it at great length. At one time it looked as though they were prepared to accept both statements. In fact, the rumour that they had done so was widespread. The *Hindustan Times*, a paper in close touch with the Congress High Command, published a cartoon under the title: "All's well that ends well," representing the Cabinet Mission packing up to go home with their work accomplished. Invitations were issued by the provincial Governors, summoning the members of the provincial legislatures to elect their delegates to the Constituent Assembly, and no opposition was raised, except that Gandhi expressed a fear (subsequently in

part allayed) that the terms of the invitation prejudged the precise functions of that body.

But once again the hopes of an agreed settlement were shipwrecked. The rock on which they foundered was the desire of Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee to substitute for one of the proposed Hindu members of the interim government a Muslim not a member of the Muslim League. They felt it necessary to insist on this because Congress, as Gandhi had always stoutly maintained, was not a Hindu but a national body with a Muslim president. They might possibly have been induced to make a special exception in the present case in accord with Clause 5 of the mission's statement, but the acrimonious articles in the Press on both sides, and Jinnah's public pronouncement that the Muslim League would never tolerate it, made them obdurate. The mission felt compelled, in view of its own statement and the obvious need for the interim government to start with a measure of goodwill, to reject the proposal.

The decision of Congress on the mission's statements of both 16 May and 16 June was finally, after Gandhi had expressed some misgivings, conveyed to us on 25 June by its President, Maulana Azad. The Working Committee had, he said:

"reluctantly come to the conclusion that they are unable to assist you in forming a provisional government as proposed in your statement of 16 June, 1946.

"With regard to the proposals made in the statement of 16 May, 1946 . . . we have pointed out what in our opinion were the defects in the proposals. We also gave our interpretation of some of the provisions of the statement. While adhering to our views, we accept your proposals and are prepared to work them with a view to achieve our objective. We would add, however, that the successful working of the Constituent Assembly will largely depend on the formation of a satisfactory provisional government."

On receipt of this letter the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy met to consider the situation. They decided that the Congress decision was an acceptance (though a qualified one) of the statement of 16 May and a rejection of that of 16 June. In accordance with paragraph 8, therefore, of the statement of 16 June, the proposals in that

document for the formation of an interim government had broken down, but both Congress and the Muslim League had qualified by their acceptance of the statement of 16 May for entering an interim government to be negotiated by the Viceroy on new lines. In view of the exhaustion of all the parties it was not, however, desirable to proceed with this at once. A stop-gap government of officials would be installed and the members of the Cabinet Mission would return home, leaving the Viceroy to take up the question of the composition of a representative interim government after a short interval, when the prospects of success might seem more encouraging. Jinnah was at once told of these decisions and expressed himself in strong dissent from them. In fact, he did not disguise his feelings that they amounted to a breach of faith. He immediately met his Working Committee, and a resolution was passed accepting the proposals of 16 June for an interim government and claiming that it should be convened at once.

The situation on 29 June, when the mission finally left Delhi to return home, was, therefore, confused and complicated. Both the major parties had accepted the proposals of 16 May for a long-term settlement, and were prepared to take part in the elections of members of the constitution-making body which were already in progress. But no representative central government had been set up or was in immediate prospect. Gandhi and other leaders of Congress were impressed with the sincerity of the Cabinet Mission in its desire to enable Indians to obtain their independence. But Jinnah felt deeply that too great concessions had been made to the demands of Congress.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE COMING OF INDEPENDENCE

**A**FTER THE DEPARTURE of the Cabinet Mission events moved forward uneasily in India. Gandhi attended the All-India Congress Committee held at Bombay on 6 July to consider the Working Committee's resolution on the mission's proposals. He recalled that he had said at Delhi that "he saw darkness all around him," but in spite of his misgivings he had not opposed the decision of the Working Committee to endorse their resolution. The scheme, he said, no doubt contained many defects, but it was in their power either to improve it or to bury it. Other Congress leaders also counselled acceptance, saying that it involved nothing but an agreement to enter the Constituent Assembly, which would be a sovereign body. In the end the decision of the Working Committee to accept was upheld by two hundred and four votes to fifty-one.

The Council of the Muslim League met on 27 July, and Jinnah in his address claimed that they were the only party which had come out of the affair with clean hands. Congress had never genuinely accepted the mission's proposals, and both in this matter and in that of the interim government the mission and the Viceroy had gone back on their undertakings to the Muslim League in an effort to conciliate the Congress. The Council ultimately decided to withdraw their previous acceptance of the mission's proposals and to prepare a programme of direct action to be launched as and when necessary. These were grave decisions.

Meanwhile, the elections to the Constituent Assembly had been held. The Sikhs boycotted them, but both the Congress and the Muslim League had taken part and had tried their best to select capable men for the Assembly. In the final result, two hundred and five Congress nominees and seventy-three members of the Muslim

League were elected. Among the former were the presidents of the Anglo-Indian Association, the Hindu *Mahasabha*, the All-India Depressed Classes League and the All-India Women's Conference, and other non-Congress members. In Assam the Congress Party took advantage of the election to carry through the Legislative Assembly of the province a resolution directing their representatives not to go into a section with Bengal, and not to cooperate with any other province in framing Assam's constitution. The Sikhs subsequently changed their minds and received permission to hold a special election and choose their representatives.

Fresh efforts were also made by Lord Wavell to form an interim government. On 22 July he wrote to Jinnah and to Nehru, the new President of Congress, inviting them to cooperate in forming it on the same numerical basis as that proposed on 16 June by the Cabinet Mission and himself. He added two riders: the first, that neither party would have the right to object to the nominees of the other, and the second, that he would welcome a convention that communal issues should require a separate majority of both the communities. On 30 July Jinnah wrote declining the invitation, and on 12 August Lord Wavell invited Nehru to send him a list of names. Nehru went immediately to Bombay to see Jinnah to try to induce him to accept portfolios in it for the Muslim League. But Jinnah considered that the basis of it was unsound, and again declined. Thereupon Nehru presented a list consisting of seven Congress representatives (including one from the scheduled castes), one Indian Christian, one Sikh, one Parsee and two non-League Muslims. The Viceroy accepted this list, but explained in a broadcast that it was still open to the Muslim League to nominate five persons to a government of fourteen which would, in that case, be re-formed.

The day on which the new government took office, 2 September, 1946, marked a turning point in Indian history. Though it remained for the time being only partially representative, and though it was still nominally the "Viceroy's Executive Council," it was regarded and referred to as "the Cabinet," and its leader, Nehru, was known as "Prime Minister"—a position which he has continued to hold up to, and following on, independence, when he first became officially entitled to the designation. By nationalist opinion throughout India

the event was hailed with great satisfaction, and its importance was recognized in the United States of America and throughout the world. In a broadcast on 7 September Nehru said that the Government would take part in international conferences as a free nation with its own policy.

The enthusiasm at the formation of the interim government was not shared by other parties in India. Ambedkar expressed dissatisfaction with the representation of the scheduled castes, the Anglo-Indians resented their exclusion from the Government and the Congress Socialists distrusted the relationship with the British Raj. Jinnah took the strongest exception to the whole procedure and to the composition of the new council. The Muslim League had already had Direct-Action Day on 16 August, and were now instructed to hoist black flags on 2 September.

While these events were taking place at the centre, communal feeling among the masses in some of the provinces was taking a terrible form. In Calcutta, riots leading to mass murder had broken out on 16 August—the Muslim League's Direct-Action Day—and lasted for several days before they could be brought under control. Official estimates placed the casualties at some five thousand killed and fifteen thousand wounded, and unofficial figures were far higher still. There was a steady improvement up to 22 September, but on that day there was a recrudescence of individual attacks, and forty deaths were reported and a hundred and forty incidents of stabbing and attacks with *lathis*. In Bombay disturbances broke out on 1 September when Muslims began to hang out black flags. These continued spasmodically until 14 September, when a further outburst of shooting and stabbing took place, the estimate of total casualties in the province being two hundred and eighty dead and eight hundred injured. In the Punjab, from the second half of August onwards, there was grave tension and some deaths were reported.

The disturbances in Calcutta spread to other parts of Bengal. Up to October the main centre was Dacca. Thereafter Noakhali, Chittagong and Howrah became affected, and killings on a huge scale took place. There began an increasing migration of refugees. Numbers of Hindus fleeing from Calcutta and East Bengal arrived in Bihar, and the story of their experiences, told verbally and in the columns of the local



Press, so inflamed popular feeling that a massacre of Muslims began in which several thousands lost their lives. In Bengal and Bihar both Hindus and Muslims were the victims of these murderous attacks. Each side charged the other with being the aggressors, and each side alleged that the atrocities were not spontaneous outbursts but organized and deliberate brutality. The full truth with regard to these unhappy events is not likely ever to be known.

In the face of these events the Viceroy made a fresh attempt to secure the participation of the Muslim League in his Executive Council, and Jinnah finally agreed to nominate five persons. Four of these were members of the Muslim League—Liaquat Ali Khan (subsequently to be the first Prime Minister of Pakistan), Abdur Rab Nishtar, I. I. Chundrigar and Ghazanfar Ali Khan—and the fifth a scheduled-caste member of Ambedkar's party, Joyandra Nath Mandal, who was a Minister in Bengal. The interim government was accordingly re-formed along these lines, and the new Ministers were sworn in on 26 October. Congress was uneasy about this "coalition," because Liaquat had said at a Press conference that he did not recognize in it any joint or collective responsibility, and because the Muslim League did not rescind its resolution of abstention from the Constituent Assembly.

The Mahatma was deeply moved at the riots and atrocities. He did not look to the Government to quell the disturbances. As was his wont, he thought in terms of individual effort. In *Harijan* of 20 October, 1946, there appeared a short article entitled "Deadly Embrace," written by him a few days before in New Delhi:

"In Bombay a Hindu gave shelter to a Muslim friend the other day. This infuriated a Hindu mob, who demanded the head of the Muslim friend. The Hindu would not surrender his friend. So both went down, literally in deadly embrace. . . . Nor is this the first instance of chivalry in the midst of frenzy. During the recent blood-bath in Calcutta, stories of Muslims having, at the peril of their lives, sheltered their Hindu friends, and *vice versa*, were recorded. Mankind would die if there were no exhibition any time and anywhere of the divine in man."

On the same day, at his prayer meeting, he dealt with the subject of persons who had been abducted or forcibly converted, or married

under duress against their will. He had no hesitation, he said, in maintaining that forcible conversion was no conversion at all, nor abduction a bar to the return to her home of the abducted girl. He held that no purification or penance was necessary in such cases. Hindu society was wrong when it imposed penance on such persons. They had not erred.

On the following Thursday a crowd of excited young men, carrying placards and shouting slogans, came to demand redress for East Bengal, and invaded the prayer ground in the Sweepers' Colony. Addressing them, Gandhi said that he knew his own place was in Bengal. He assured them that the heart of every man and woman who believed in God was bleeding for Bengal. He admonished them for creating a disturbance at prayer time. He was further reported in *Harijan* of 3 November as saying:

"Our women were easily scared away. It was so more or less all the world over. He wanted our women to learn to be brave. His advice to them to commit suicide rather than allow themselves to be dishonoured had been much misunderstood. They could keep a dagger for self-defence if they wished to. But a dagger was no use against overwhelming odds. He had advised them to take poison and end their lives rather than submit to dishonour. Their very preparedness should make them brave. No one could dishonour a woman who was fearless of death. They had two ways of self-defence—to kill and be killed or to die without killing. He would teach them the latter, not the former. Above all, he wanted them to be fearless. There was no sin like cowardice."

He reminded his audience that there was a moral code even for those who believed in violence. Leading Muslims had made it clear that Islam did not permit forcible conversion, or abduction and molestation of women.

Early in November four members of the interim government—Nehru and Patel from the Congress, and Liaquat and Nishtar from the Muslim League—visited Bengal together, and Nehru and Nishtar stayed for some days in Bihar on the way back. Their joint presence had a salutary effect and, for the time being at least, an impending crisis was averted. As their visit coincided with that of the Viceroy

it gave rise to all kinds of speculation. Would they ask the Viceroy to intervene, or would they exert pressure on the Bengal Governor to make the Bengal ministry take more effective measures ? In a series of after-prayer addresses, Gandhi impressed on the people how the desire for retaliation and the tendency to look for protection to the Viceroy or the Governor, or to the military and the police, were incompatible with that independence to which they were all now pledged.

While Gandhi was in Calcutta news continued to pour in of the Hindu retaliation in Bihar. It filled him with horror. It was in Bihar that his political career had commenced. And now it was the people of Bihar, for whom he had indefatigably laboured and who had showered upon him such love and affection, who had gone mad and besmirched the fair name of India. "The news from Bihar has shaken me," he wrote on 5 November to Nehru.<sup>1</sup> "My own duty seems to be clear. A deep bond unites me with Bihar. How can I forget that ? If even half of what one hears is true, it shows that Bihar has forgotten humanity. . . . My inner voice tells me, 'You may not live to be a witness to this senseless slaughter. If people refuse to see what is clear as daylight and pay no heed to what you say, does it not mean that your day is over ?' The logic of the argument is driving me irresistibly towards a fast."

At the same time Gandhi reacted adversely to Nehru's statement that the Central Government would, in its refusal to tolerate such barbarism, use even aerial bombing to put it down. That was the way of the British, commented Gandhi in his silent day's written message to the prayer-meeting. The Congress was an organization of the people. By suppressing the riots with the aid of the military they would be suppressing India's freedom. And yet what was Panditji (Nehru) to do if the Congress had lost control of the people ? The answer was that "the better way, of course, was to give up the reins of government if the people were not amenable to discipline and reason."<sup>2</sup> Such an answer was in keeping with Gandhi's fundamental philosophy. Non-violence was to him a sacred principle, to be followed not only by a minority in revolt, but also by a government

<sup>1</sup> Reported in *Harijan*, 17 November.

<sup>2</sup> The same.

in full strength and power. But to many minds it seemed a hard saying which would be likely, if accepted, to lead to anarchy and disruption.

During the cold weather of 1946-47 Gandhi took up his residence in East Bengal, and set himself systematically to the work of reconciliation. For some time he made his own headquarters in Shrirampore and distributed his little band of trusted disciples in neighbouring villages. He mingled freely with Muslims and Hindus, and expounded his gospel to them equally. He reminded Muslims of the campaign he had conducted on their behalf years before in the Caliphate agitation. The Allah of Islam, he said, was the protector of innocence. What had been done in East Bengal had not the sanction of Islam as preached by its Prophet. He told Hindus that, as a little boy, he had been weaned of fear and timidity by his nurse Rambha. "When in fear take Ramanama. He will protect you," she used to tell him. "He resided," he added, "in the hearts of the pure always." "You may say you do not believe in Him. You do not know that but for His will you could not draw a single breath. Call Him Ishwar, Allah, God, Ahura Mazda. His names are innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my Rama. He alone is my Lord and Master."

While he was in East Bengal Gandhi learned of the attacks of Hindus elsewhere on small minorities of Muslims in their midst. He was full of grief and shame at the news. He was indignant when they told him that the retaliation in Bihar had "cooled the Muslims down." "That means," he said, "that it has cowed them down for the time being. They forget that two can play at that game. Bihar has forged a link in the chain of our slavery." "The independence of India is to-day at stake in Bengal and Bihar," he added.

"Biharis have behaved as cowards. If the Biharis wanted to retaliate, they could have gone to Noakhali and died to a man. But for a thousand Hindus to fall upon a handful of Mussalmans—men, women and children—living in their midst, is no retaliation but just brutality. It is the privilege of arms to protect the weak and helpless. The best succour that Bihar could have given to the Hindus of East Bengal would have been to guarantee

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with their own lives the absolute safety of the Muslim population living in their midst. Their example would have told."

Meanwhile, in spite of the fact that there was now a coalition government at the centre, there were no signs that the Muslim League would allow its representatives to participate in the Constituent Assembly which was due to meet on 9 December. There was also disagreement over the interpretation of the statement made on 16 May by the Cabinet Mission. Two points were involved. Had a whole province (e.g. Assam) the right to refuse *ab initio* to take part in the work of a section, in addition to its admitted right to opt out of a group if one ever came to be formed? Secondly, was the voting in a section to be by provinces and not by majority of members present? On the answer to these questions the outcome of the Constituent Assembly might well depend. Apart from Gandhi, Congress had accepted with some reluctance a negative answer to the first question. But they claimed to be entitled to give a positive answer to the second. Jinnah insisted on a negative answer to both.

In order to resolve the issue, Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat and Baldev Singh came specially to London at the invitation of the British Prime Minister. When it was found that no agreement between the Indian parties would be reached the Cabinet issued a statement on 6 December, 1946, to the effect that, after taking legal advice as to the proper interpretation of the statement of 16 May, it adhered to the view always held by the mission that the voting in sections should be by simple majority; and it asked that this view should be accepted by all parties. It added this significant paragraph:

"There has never been any prospect of success for the Constituent Assembly, except upon the basis of the agreed procedure. Should a constitution come to be framed by a Constituent Assembly in which a large section of the Indian population had not been represented, His Majesty's Government would not, of course, contemplate—as the Congress have stated they would not contemplate—forcing such a constitution upon any unwilling parts of the country."

No mention was made by His Majesty's Government of the suggestion that the representatives of a province were entitled to refuse to go into the appropriate section, because Congress High Command



*Lord and Lady Mountbatten entertain Gandhi at the  
Viceroy's House, Delhi, 1947*



*A granddaughter and a grandniece support the Mahatma on his way to a prayer meeting*



*Bapu during his last fast, January, 1948*

had already accepted the mission's view that such a refusal was ruled out. Gandhi, however, held an entirely opposite opinion. It will be remembered that he had already explained (see p. 274) that the acceptance by Congress of the mission's statement as a whole was not binding on individual representatives, and he now went further and specifically gave advice to them to follow their own inclinations. Two Assam congressmen interviewed him on 15 December and asked for guidance in regard to the question of grouping. He said:<sup>1</sup> "I do not need a single minute to come to a decision. . . . I told Bardoloi, Prime Minister of Assam, that if there is no clear guidance from the Congress Committee Assam should not go into the sections. It should lodge its protest and retire from the Constituent Assembly. It will be a kind of *satyagraha* against the Congress for the good of the Congress. . . . I have the same advice for the Sikhs. But your position is much happier than that of the Sikhs. You are a whole province. They are a community inside a province. But I feel that every individual has the right to act for himself, just as I have."

In tendering this advice to the Hindu majority in Assam and to the Sikhs in the Punjab, Gandhi was taking upon himself a very grave responsibility. It was not merely that he was upholding his own interpretation of the mission's statement against that put upon it both by His Majesty's Government and by the political leaders of Congress. He was definitely jeopardizing the whole functioning of the mission's three-tier scheme. Supported by the weight of his high authority, it was almost certain that both Assam and the Sikhs would, when the time came, follow their own inclinations. It was equally almost certain that, in the face of this threat, Jinnah and the Muslim League would stay away from the Constituent Assembly altogether. If that were, indeed, the case, it seemed to most people that there were only three possible courses that events might take. The first was that the British would decide to stay on in India and resume their dominance, by force if necessary. The second was partition. The third was an attempt by the majority to coerce the minority into acceptance of a unitary state, with the almost certain consequence of civil war. But Gandhi hoped against hope that, faced with these dire alternatives, the Indian communities might yet be induced to agree to build a

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 29 December, 1946.



constitution on modified or different lines, under which they could all live together in mutual goodwill.

Meanwhile, on 9 December the Constituent Assembly met. But there were empty chairs where the representatives of the Muslim League should have sat. The leaders of Congress were only too conscious of the air of unreality which their absence cast upon its deliberations, and they showed their anxiety by refraining from taking any steps which would make it more difficult for the Muslims to enter at a later stage. Accordingly, the December session was purposely a very short one. After preliminary formalities and the election of a chairman, the committee on minorities was elected with places left open for Muslim League delegates. A declaration of independence was moved by Nehru, and spoken to by several other members. The Assembly was then adjourned without this motion having been put to the vote, and without any proposal having been brought forward to break up into sections.

The New Year, 1947, therefore opened inauspiciously. At the centre, in the interim government, there was thinly veiled hostility between the two main communities. In the Constituent Assembly there seemed little prospect that attendance would become fully representative. In the provinces unrest continued, notably in the Punjab and Bihar and in Bengal, whose uneasy truce from violence Gandhi was striving so valiantly to convert into goodwill and cooperation.

In order to break the deadlock the British Government decided to issue, on 20 February, a new declaration.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi had always said that the indispensable prerequisite for Indians getting together to decide their own destiny was for the British to "quit India"—by which he meant not the physical departure of every Britisher, but the withdrawal of the will and the means to interfere in Indian self-rule. Such a withdrawal had been the policy of His Majesty's Government for some time past, but the new declaration was more specific in the matter, because it fixed a final date (June, 1948) before which power would be transferred. On the question as to who should be the recipient of power the declaration was less precise. If it should appear that by the date mentioned a fully representative Assembly had not

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 7047.

worked out a constitution on the lines indicated by the Cabinet Mission, His Majesty's Government would have to decide, it said, whether:

"the powers of the central government in British India should be handed over on the due date as a whole to some form of central government for British India, or in some areas to the existing provincial governments, or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people."

Considerable sensation was created by this pronouncement. In Britain the Parliamentary Opposition in the House of Commons voted against it, concentrating mainly on the date, which was regarded as far too early. In the Lords a statesmanlike speech by Lord Halifax was mainly responsible for inducing the Peers to refrain from going on record against it. In India it was hailed with a certain measure of surprise and a new sense of urgency. It was realized fully for the first time that the responsibility now rested with Indians themselves to resolve the communal discord. Nevertheless, there were no signs of a *rapprochement* between Congress and the Muslim League.

Gandhi continued with indomitable courage his pilgrimage of Eastern Bengal, travelling from village to village expounding his gospel. Questioned as to his views on the partition of Bengal, Gandhi said<sup>1</sup> he had always been against it. But it was not uncommon even for brothers to fight and separate from one another. If the Hindus desired to keep everyone united by means of compulsion, he would be against it. He was equally opposed to compulsory partition and compulsory unity. There was no shadow of doubt that the British were going to quit India in the near future. Hindu and Muslim should, therefore, determine to live in peace and amity. The alternative was civil war, which could only serve to tear the country to pieces.

In March, 1947, Gandhi moved forward into Bihar. Speaking in Passa on 13 March, he made an appeal to the local Hindu villagers to restore all the property looted from Muslim homes. They should also, he said, clean up the debris that had been created by their mischief and make it possible for their Muslim neighbours to return

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 23 March, 1947.

home quickly and safely. On the twenty-seventh, at Okri, he struck a new note. A few days before, Lord Mountbatten had succeeded Lord Wavell as Viceroy. Gandhi pointed out that in his very first pronouncement he had stated that he had been sent out as the last Viceroy, to wind up British rule in India. They must have noticed, he said, that that pronouncement was "deliberate, unconditional and unequivocal." But he very much feared that by the insane folly of what was happening in Bihar and the Punjab they might themselves tempt the Viceroy to eat his words.

At the beginning of April, Gandhiji paid a hurried visit to Delhi to address the concluding session of the Inter-Asian Conference. He told his audience that if they wanted to find the true heart of India they must look for it not in her westernized cities, but in one of her seven hundred thousand villages. All the great religious teachers of the world, including Jesus, had come from the East. Today the peoples of Asia must re-deliver their message to the West. The conquest of the West must be completed, not by vengeance for her exploitation of the East, but by bringing to her afresh the wisdom for which she was pining in her despair at the multiplication of the atom bomb. This wisdom, he said, was the message of love and truth, which appealed to the heart as well as to the head of the peoples of the world.

He was soon back on his pilgrimage, and in the middle of April his voice, pleading for abstention from violence, was reinforced by that of Jinnah. The two men published a joint declaration in which they said :

"We denounce for all time the use of force to achieve political ends, and we call upon all communities of India, to whatever persuasion they may belong, not only to refrain from all acts of violence and disorder, but also to avoid both in speech and writing any incitement to such acts."

Gandhi was also gladdened by the announcement made in the Central Assembly by the Finance Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, of the repeal of the salt tax, for which Gandhi had unceasingly agitated for so many long years.

On the other hand, on the purely political plane Gandhi's heart was torn with anxious foreboding for the future of his country.

Events were taking a turn which he had persistently refused even to contemplate. The idea of partition—the “vivisection of India” as he had once called it—seemed to him gaining ground. What was even worse, he learnt with dismay that the partition of India was likely to be accompanied by the partition of the provinces of Bengal and the Punjab, and that this had the support of Congress leaders. “The very demand for the partition of provinces,” he is reported<sup>1</sup> to have said to a friend during a visit to Calcutta, “implies that we have reconciled ourselves to Pakistan. Otherwise, instead of saying that if there is Pakistan, Bengal and the Punjab should also be divided, we should have firmly declared: ‘No. India shall remain one; no power on earth can divide her.’” A few days earlier<sup>2</sup> Jinnah, the main advocate of the partition of India, had with equal emphasis denounced the proposal to partition the provinces. His arguments against the partition of the Punjab and Bengal were in essence the same as Gandhi’s arguments against the partition of India; namely, that these provinces were cultural and economic units in spite of their being divided by religion. No doubt, also, as the architect of Pakistan he was unwilling to see its prospective territories diminished.

But in the end the views of these two leaders did not prevail. Indian Muslims were not prepared to be merely a minority in an independent united India, mainly Hindu. So, in spite of Gandhi, India was divided. Non-Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal were not prepared to be merely a minority in a separate Muslim state. So, in spite of Gandhi and Jinnah, these provinces were cut in two. History has provided many illustrations of the truth of the saying that government rests on the consent of the governed. When any substantial, politically conscious, articulate section of a community refuses to acquiesce in the rule of another section it cannot permanently be forced to do so. Ireland and the suffragettes had been two recent British examples. Gandhi himself had proved the truth of the maxim in his successful campaign in India for throwing off the British yoke. Now the course of events was inexorably moving forward towards a further illustration, in the internal affairs of India.

One of the first to discern the situation was none other than

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 1 June, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> In a statement issued on 30 April.

Nehru, the life-long friend of Gandhiji and, like him, a firm believer in a united India. In a speech on 14 April he had used these words:

“It is our misfortune that some sections of the people do not want to march together with us. . . . The time has now come to decide whether we want a united India or a divided India. The question must be decided immediately. . . . Sind has declared that it will become independent in June, 1948, after the British leave India. If parts of the Punjab and Bengal want to separate no one can compel them the other way. . . . The leaders should negotiate to find out solutions for these problems.”

Lord Mountbatten, after his arrival in India, was quick to sense the position. He lost no time in taking soundings and came to the conclusion that it would be highly dangerous to try to continue the existing régime up to June, 1948, the date originally set for the final transfer of power. A scheme for a compromise settlement began to take shape in his mind, and at the beginning of May he laid it before the leaders of Congress, the Muslim League and the Sikh community. Armed with their several concurrence, he hastened to London at the end of the month to commend it to the new Secretary of State<sup>1</sup> and to His Majesty's Government. He secured approval, and he returned to India with a draft statement to be made simultaneously on 3 June in Britain and in India.

This statement envisaged the creation of Pakistan, if demanded by the Muslim representatives in the Muslim majority provinces. It provided for the partition of provinces, notably Bengal and the Punjab, if demanded by a majority of either party in the Legislative Assemblies of these provinces. It proposed that a referendum should be held in the district of Sylhet to decide whether it should remain part of Assam or join up with Eastern Bengal. It proposed that the transference of power should be antedated, and that pending the completion of the new constitution or constitutions the basis should be Dominion status, without prejudice to the future free choice of the Indian peoples.

This statement was accepted by Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh on behalf of the three principal communities in India, and by all parties in both Houses of the British Parliament. Though by no

<sup>1</sup> Lord Listowel had taken my place shortly before the end of April.

means an ideal solution, it was recognized as the best compromise that could be effected in view of the grievous communal differences. A few weeks later the British Parliament carried through all its stages without a division the Indian Independence Act, expressing in legislative form the proposals of the statement of 3 June. It enacted that as from 15 August, 1947, two independent Dominions should be set up in India, to be known respectively as India and Pakistan, that the Indian Army should be divided and that Bengal and the Punjab should each be split in two.

When, on the appointed day, the actual transference of power took place there were scenes of great rejoicing in India which found their echo in London, where the Indian community and their European friends and well-wishers gathered together at the offices of the two High Commissioners to unfurl the flags of the new Dominions. It was a particularly happy augury that both High Commissioners were present at both ceremonies, which were timed consecutively for the express purpose of enabling them to be so.

But the man who, more than anyone else, had been responsible for freeing his country from alien rule did not share in these rejoicings. On the contrary, he confessed that he saw darkness everywhere. He made no secret of the fact that while the question was still open he had opposed the settlement, and even now he hoped that the time would come when the partition would be undone and India would be once more a united country. He grieved, too, that even in the Dominion of India, where Congress ruled, his principle of non-violence was not to be adopted and that order would be enforced by the army and the police. Nevertheless, because the settlement had been accepted by his colleagues he acquiesced in it, and when he was asked whether he would undertake a fast against it he gave a negative reply. In spite of the fact that he had reached an advanced age, at which most men claim for themselves release from arduous work, he was already contemplating a renewed pilgrimage and, if necessary, a "fast unto death" to induce his compatriots in the disaffected areas to forget their differences and behave one to the other with brotherly love. Such was the heroic stuff of which was made this great leader of his countrymen and teacher of mankind.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE MAHATMA'S LAST SACRIFICE

**T**HE FIFTEENTH OF AUGUST, 1947, had come and gone. British rule had been withdrawn from India. Independence had become an accomplished fact. A heavy price for it had been paid in the partition of the Peninsula and of two of its leading provinces. Now the consequences and the inherent dangers must be faced.

Gandhi had been one of the last of the statesmen to acquiesce in the settlement; he was now to be in the forefront of the struggle to enable it to function without disaster. He left to the politicians the task of creating the apparatus of government in the new Dominions and of devising and conducting their internal and external policy, including their relationships to one another and to the Indian states. He set himself the task of steadying the psychological reaction of the mass of the people.

It was not surprising that their minds were disturbed. Congress had fought the 1947 elections on the demand for the independence of a united India; it had won independence, but it had had to accept partition. The Muslim League had campaigned on the basis of a large Pakistan; it had had to accept a restricted area with the partition of Bengal and the Punjab. The Sikhs had stood for a united homeland and for no domination by the Muslims; they had had to accept a partition of the Punjab which divided into two the Sikh people, and a Pakistan in which many of them would be subject to Muslim rule. Owing to the shortness of the interval between the settlement and its implementation, there had been little time to explain the reasons for the compromise and to "sell" it (as the Americans say) to the Indian masses before it had become an accomplished fact.

In these circumstances it is remarkable that over wide areas of the Peninsula, even where there was a mixture of the communities,

the settlement was accepted without demur and with little or no disturbance. But all eyes were turned upon the two provinces of Bengal and the Punjab, in both of which there had been, during the previous year, scenes of mass murder and outrage. Would these be repeated now on an even greater scale? Unhappily, in the Punjab the worst fears were realized. Great numbers of the population were brutally murdered. Homes were burned or wrecked. Migration and counter-migration began on a scale unequalled in history. The two governments of India and Pakistan cooperated to deal with this appalling catastrophe and to try to mitigate some of its worst horrors. With the help of troops order was, in the end, substantially restored, but not until the toll of life had run into tens of thousands and the migrants into millions.

In Bengal none of these things happened. The presence of one man prevented them. That man was Mahatma Gandhi. A few days before 15 August he had set out for Noakhali with the intention of making it his headquarters, as he had done in the previous winter. In the course of his journey thither he was met by Suhrawardy, the Muslim ex-premier of Bengal. Suhrawardy impressed on Gandhi that it was Calcutta to which he should go, because if he could establish communal peace there it would set the tone for the whole of Bengal. Gandhi accepted this advice, and he and Suhrawardy went to Calcutta and lived there together in a Muslim house, and from that centre Gandhi carried on his mission of goodwill. His example, the great respect and reverence in which he was held by people of all communities, the memory of his noble pilgrimage of six months previously—all contributed to work a miraculous deliverance from communal disorder. Hindus and Muslims in their thousands began to embrace one another. They began to pass freely through places which had been considered to be points of danger by one party or the other. It was not uncommon to hear both with one voice crying: "Jai Hind" or "Hindu-Muslims be One." On 18 August, Hindus even joined in the Muslim festival of Id.

Critics whispered: "It will not last. As soon as the emotional fervour ingeminated by the Mahatma has expended itself and the hard realities of life are felt, the situation will be as bad as ever." And, indeed, in September riots did break out. Gandhi then resorted to a



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more drastic remedy. He embarked upon a fast unto death to be broken only if the communal killing stopped in Calcutta. Immediately there was revulsion against rioting and the people of Calcutta gave their pledge, and to this day thousands of Muslims in Calcutta roam the streets in peace and safety thanks to the miracle wrought by the Man of Peace. The Muslim League newspaper *Morning News*, paying tribute to him on behalf of the Calcutta Muslims, forming 23 per cent of the city's population, said: "He was ready to die so that they might live peacefully." And the correspondent of the *London Times* justly summed up the situation by the remark that Gandhi had achieved more than could have been effected by several divisions of troops.

At the end of September, Gandhi returned to Delhi. He had been accustomed to stay there in the Sweepers' Colony; but his usual quarters among them were now occupied by refugees, and he was taken instead to Birla House. At his first prayer-meeting he expressed his regret at the cause of the change, and at the gloom which prevailed in the city owing to the terrible atrocities which were being committed all around. A few days later he dealt with the matter of the wholesale migrations which were taking place both ways across the frontier between India and Pakistan. It was the duty of both governments, he said, to protect their minorities; and he repeated his advice to the Hindus and Sikhs in Rawalpindi that they should all be prepared to die to a man rather than leave their homes. Speaking of himself, he said he wanted to go to all parts of Pakistan under the protection of no escort save God. He would go as the friend of Muslims as of others. His life would be at their disposal. He would cheerfully die at the hands of anyone who chose to take his life. He would then have done what he was advising all to do.

On 2 October Gandhi celebrated his seventy-eighth birthday. Many friends sent him congratulations. But in acknowledging them he said that there was "nothing but agony" in his heart. He could not live while hatred and killing marred the atmosphere. He, therefore, pleaded with them all to give up the present madness. Turning his attention to the material needs of the refugees, he organized a blanket fund to be used for the most destitute cases. But through all he did not lose his interest in other causes with which he had been connected

all his life; and his addresses after his daily prayer-meetings ranged over an incredible number of different spiritual and material subjects. In particular, he followed with deep attention the struggle of Indians in South Africa to free themselves from the limitations imposed upon them under the law. But the killings and the intimidations were always in the background of his mind; and addressing himself, as was his wont, mainly to Hindus and Sikhs, he pleaded with them continuously to bring them to an end.

At last he could bear it no longer. On 12 January, 1948, he announced his intention to undertake yet one more fast. After referring to the "apparent" calm that had been brought about by prompt military and police action, he said that the storm might burst out again any day. It was his vow to "do" which alone kept him from death, "the incomparable friend." The voice within him had been beckoning him for a long time, but he had been shutting his ears to it lest it might be the voice of Satan. Fasting was the last resort of the *satyagrahi* in place of the sword. "I have no answer," he went on, "to the Muslim friends who see me from day to day as to what they should do. My impotence has been gnawing at me of late. It will go immediately the fast is undertaken. I have been brooding over it for the last three days. The final conclusion has flashed upon me and it makes me happy. No man, if he is pure, has anything more precious to give than his life. I hope and pray that I have the purity in me to justify the step."

So the fast began on the following day, 13 January, 1948. From all over India messages poured in upon him. Throughout the world intense interest was shown in his progress. Daily he continued to address the crowd gathered at his prayer-meeting. Sometimes he was too weak to be heard, and then a friend read out the words he had written down. The Government of India, owing to the Kashmir dispute, had been withholding from the Government of Pakistan certain substantial sums of money which they had previously agreed to hand over to them as part of the division of the assets of the whole of India. As a result of Gandhi's fast they now decided to pay this money over. This, Gandhi said, had put the Pakistan Government on its honour and ought to lead to an honourable settlement not only on the Kashmir question, but on all the differences between the two

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Dominions. But the fast went on until Sunday, 18 January, when news reached him that a Peace Committee representative of all communities in Delhi had signed a pact pledging brotherly amity and the protection of the life, property and faith of the Muslim minority. India and the world rejoiced that Gandhi was not to die as a result of his fast, but they little realized how short was to be the reprieve.

Two days later, on 20 January, a warning was given. During the prayer-meeting a bomb was thrown by a youth into the Birla House compound. It exploded without anyone being hurt. Referring to the incident next day, Gandhi said that he had not realized at the time what had happened. Now that he did know, he wanted to say that no one should look down upon the misguided youth. He probably regarded Gandhi as an enemy of Hinduism. The youth should realize that those who differed from him were not necessarily evil. To those who were at the back of the youth he would appeal to desist from such activity. That was not the way to save Hinduism. He had told the Inspector-General of Police not to harass the youth in any way. They should try to win him over and convert him to right thinking and doing. To his audience he said that he expected them to go on with the prayers in spite of bomb explosions or a shower of bullets.

In his address on 26 January, "Independence Day," Gandhi asked what in fact were they celebrating? "Now," he said, "that we have handled independence we seem to be disillusioned. At least I am, even if you are not." But they were entitled to hope that the worst was over and that they were on the road to showing the lowliest of the villagers that it meant his freedom from serfdom. Violence, veiled or unveiled, must be tabu. He deprecated strikes, which meant material loss to the whole community. He knew that he himself had been responsible for many successful strikes in the past. But at that time there was neither independence nor the kind of legislation that they had now. He proceeded to descant upon the decontrol of essential commodities which he favoured, and upon the growing evil of corruption against which Gandhi begged his hearers to be ever vigilant and active. It was a quiet, gentle, reasonable address which showed the Mahatma in full possession of all his mental powers.

On Saturday, 30 January, the fatal blow was struck. Early in the morning he had said to Bishwan, his personal attendant: "Bring me

all my important letters. I must reply to them today, for tomorrow I may never be." Shortly after five o'clock, Gandhi came out into the grounds of Birla House, to attend the prayer-meeting. He was leaning on the shoulder of his grandniece, Manu Gandhi. As he was going up the steps to the prayer platform a Hindu youth, a Brahmin from Poona, suddenly broke through the congregation and bent as if he were bowing before him. Pushing the girl aside, he started shooting. The first bullet hit Gandhi in the abdomen. He chanted "Ram, Ram" ("O God, O God"). Two more shots followed. He fell back, his spectacles dangling and his sandals coming away. Blood gushed from his abdomen and his breast. Gandhi's hands slipped from Manu's shoulders and he lifted them, folded in a gesture of prayer, towards his audience. As he was being carried back to his room in Birla House he lost consciousness. All efforts to save his life failed, and thirty minutes later the silent, anxious crowds waiting outside were told simply: "Bapu is dead."

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A great cry of grief went up, and thousands of men and women gathered in the compound, weeping and beating their breasts. As the news went round the world, millions from the Himalayas to the tip of Cape Comorin wept, and millions in other lands mourned with them. Later the same evening, Pandit Nehru, over the radio, spoke these poignant words: "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. . . . The father of the nation is no more. . . . The best prayer we can offer him and his memory is to dedicate ourselves to truth and to the cause for which this great countryman of ours lived and for which he died."

Next day Gandhi's body was carried by his granddaughter, Ava Gandhi, and his secretary and devotees from Birla House to an army vehicle covered with flowers. His face was uncovered and his body clothed in white homespun cloth. Then, in a procession stretching for five miles, the cortège of the dead leader passed through masses of falling flowers and petals on its way to Raj Ghat, on the banks of the Jumna.

Lord Mountbatten, Governor-General of India; Pandit Nehru, Prime Minister; Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Deputy Premier; Sardar

## LAST YEARS

Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister, and other Cabinet Ministers were there. Every diplomatic mission had sent a wreath of flowers. Conches and trumpets were blown as the cortège left the house. The funeral carriage was drawn by units of India's Army, Navy and Air Force. Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel and Baldev Singh sat on the carriage alongside Gandhi's body.

At the Raj Ghat, where hundreds of thousands of people were gathered, Gandhi's body was placed on the sandalwood pyre. Dakotas of the Royal Indian Air Force, dipping in salute, showered flowers on the bier. Pandit Nehru, leaving his place among the mourners, walked to the bier and, falling on his knees, kissed Gandhi's feet. Devadas Gandhi, the son of the Mahatma, stood at the head of the bier.

A light was applied to the pyre. Flames rose quickly from all four corners. Every few minutes Devadas threw a pile of sandalwood on to the flames. Incense, camphor and coconut were added, and as the crowds pressed forward around the chief mourners the smoke cloud hid all from view. The flames increased as the ceremony ended.

In Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and other great centres of population the saffron, white and green flag of the Indian Dominion was flown at half-mast. People gathered in the streets in small, silent groups. Shops closed everywhere, meetings adjourned and newspaper offices were besieged by anxious crowds.

Tributes to Mahatma Gandhi poured in from all over the world. The King sent the following message to Lord Mountbatten: "The Queen and I are deeply shocked by the news of the death of Mr. Gandhi. Will you please convey to the people of India our sincere sympathy in the irreparable loss which they and, indeed, mankind have suffered." Lord Mountbatten in reply said: "Mr. Gandhi's death is truly a loss to mankind, which so sorely needs the living light of those ideals of love and tolerance for which he strove and died. In her hour of deep sorrow India is proud to have given to the world a man of his imperishable renown, and is confident that his example will be a source of inspiration and strength in the fulfilment of her destiny."

President Truman wrote: "Another giant among men has fallen in the cause of brotherhood and peace. Gandhi was a leader of

international stature. His teachings and his actions have left a deep impression on millions of people. His life and his work will be, through the ages, the greatest monument to him." The Pope expressed his deep grief for "the man who was the spiritual leader of millions of Indians and who had always struggled for peace."

The British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, in a broadcast said that in offering his sympathy he was expressing the views of the British people. For a quarter of a century this one man had been the major factor in every consideration of the Indian problem. He had become the expression of the aspirations of the Indian people for independence, but he was not just a nationalist. His most distinctive doctrine was that of non-violence. He had, besides, a hatred of injustice and strove earnestly on behalf of the poor, especially of the depressed classes in India. He concluded with these words: "The hand of the murderer has struck him down and a voice which pleaded for peace and brotherhood has been silenced, but I am certain that his spirit will continue to animate his fellow-countrymen and will plead for peace and concord."

M. Bidault, the French Foreign Minister, in a telegram said: "The lifework and the enlightenment of the distinguished victim are a gift to mankind that will last for ever." Mr. Marshall, the U.S.A. Secretary of State, described Gandhi as the "spokesman for the conscience of all mankind," and said that the news of his death had profoundly shocked members of the Security Council. Madame Chiang Kai-shek sent the heartfelt sympathy of the Chinese people.

Inside India, Muslims joined with Hindus and Sikhs in expressions of grief. Jinnah, the Governor-General of Pakistan, described Gandhi as "the greatest man produced by the Hindu community." Liaquat Ali Khan, the Pakistan Prime Minister, deplored the loss of one who had been "working unceasingly to bring sanity to the people and restore communal harmony." The *Pakistan Times* headed its editorial with the caption, "Glorious Dust." *Dawn* wrote: "All Muslims are bowed with grief at the ghastly ending to so great a life." The *Morning News* of Calcutta said that India had been "orphaned."

Inside the more intimate circle of his political associates deep emotion at their irreparable loss struggled with the passionate resolve to carry on the work which he had wished them to do. Pandit Nehru

beautifully expressed the general feeling when he said: "Though Gandhiji's earthly sojourn is ended, his spirit will serve as a beacon light to guide us. He led us triumphantly in the battle for freedom. In gratitude for what he has done for us, we owe him a duty. Our duty is to complete the work started by him and to establish the India of his ideal. In India we must give equal rights to all persons, irrespective of their religion, and we have also to extend to the rest of the world that lesson of equality of all men." To this Sardar Patel added the admonition to cease to reflect on their loss or nurse their grief and to set out, with renewed vigour and enthusiasm, on "the constructive work which Gandhiji has left unfulfilled, but which I am confident he would have liked us to pursue with single-minded devotion and undivided attention."

\*            \*            \*

The last rites were performed on the afternoon of 12 February, when the ceremony of immersion of Gandhi's ashes in the holy rivers of India was carried out. The place chosen was Allahabad, at the confluence of the Ganges, the Jumna and the Saraswati, where the ashes of his wife Kasturba had been immersed. A vast concourse of people were present, and as the boat bearing the sacred urn glided into the water thousands of people swam across, while aeroplanes overhead showered flowers on the urn and sacred hymns from the scriptures were chanted. The concluding words of one of these has been translated as follows:

"Holy soul, may sun, air and fire be auspicious unto thee. Thy dear ones on this earth do not bewail their lot at thy departure, for they know that thou art gone to the radiant regions of the blessed. May the waters of all rivers and oceans be helpful unto thee, and serve thee ever in thy good deeds for the welfare of all beings; may all space and its four quarters be open unto thee for thy good deeds."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### GANDHI'S ROLE IN WORLD HISTORY

**N**O ONE TRULY understands the life and thought of Mahatma Gandhi who imagines that the emancipation of India from foreign rule was the main purpose of his life, or that its attainment was his greatest contribution to the land of his birth. For his kingdom, like that of the Christ or the Buddha, was not of this world; and it was the moral emancipation of his countrymen and countrywomen from the sins of sloth, cowardice, malice and uncharitableness that was his overriding passion. Nevertheless, unlike these founders of two great religions, Gandhi stepped down from the high plane of spiritual leadership to mingle in the arena of everyday affairs. In that, he more nearly resembled the Hebrew prophets who played an active part in the statecraft of their day.

Gandhi was not unaware that in so doing he might soil his feet with the mud of political conflict, and that he would be liable to make errors in strategy and tactics which would lay him open to legitimate criticism. But he deliberately chose that course for two reasons. First, because he saw, in the acceptance of wrong political conditions, a degradation of the human spirit; and secondly, because he identified himself with the common people and desired to be a partner in their joys and sorrows, their struggles, their failures and their victories. In the last chapter of his autobiography he wrote: "To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."



Born in India and brought up as a strict Hindu, Gandhi continued to the end in that faith and in the observance of much of the Hindu way of life. But he held in almost equal reverence the Christian and Buddhist scriptures and those of Islam and Zoroaster, and frequently quoted from them in his discourses. Many of the current practices of Hinduism were repugnant to him, and he did not hesitate to "re-interpret" the Hindu scriptures in accordance with the promptings of his own inner voice.

He read widely the works of great writers, and his own philosophy bore the imprint of their thought and teaching. In particular, Ruskin and Tolstoy exerted a lasting influence upon him, and the philosophic anarchism of the great Russian was incorporated into his own gospel. Strange as it always seemed to many of his contemporaries, Gandhi also carried with him to his dying day the legal outlook which he had imbibed during his early youth when he had studied law in a lawyer's office in London. This unusual combination of the saint and the lawyer made him often a baffling person with whom to conduct negotiations.

Gandhi was a puritan and an ascetic. He distrusted all forms of the gratification of the flesh. His views on diet were so strict that he even regarded the drinking of cow's milk with disfavour. But it would be quite wrong to think of him as dull or depressing. He was a fascinating companion whose advice was always penetrating and inspiring and whose conversation was lit up by flashes of humour and by many a merry twinkle of his eyes.

Gandhi has been sometimes spoken of as the interpreter of India to the outside world, but it is equally true, and even more significant, that he was the interpreter of India to herself. He knew that the true heart of India did not reside in her sophisticated, westernized cities, but in her seven hundred thousand villages; and it was to this heart that he addressed his appeal. And because he identified himself with the humble life of the common villager, he won that heart.

His central doctrine of *ahimsa* belonged to the great tradition of India. Of course, his people often failed lamentably to put it into practice, just as professing Christians fail to carry out the corresponding precept of Christ to "do unto others as you would that they should do unto you." But in their hearts the common people know

that the teaching of the Masters contains the words of eternal life.

Most religions recognize two standards of conduct—one for the disciple and another for ordinary folk. Even the Buddha had one rule for his “order” and one, less exacting, for the “householder.” Gandhi refused to make any such distinction. Before every individual—high-born or low-born, lettered or ignorant—he held up the highest that he knew, and he was not prepared to accept any departure from it on the grounds of expediency. Thus, to the common man and woman he preached bravery in the face of danger and a willingness to offer up one’s life “a willing sacrifice.” In the matter of sex he preached continence, and he rejected birth control as a remedy for over-population. In the drinking of alcohol he called for total abstinence. What he demanded from others he accepted for himself. Only in the matter of fasting did he make a distinction. He seems to have felt that his own fasts were in the nature of a vicarious penance which sufficed for all.

During the course of his active life Gandhi had to deal with five main political problems—colour prejudice, war, race-domination, untouchability and communal dissension. He was still a young man when he went to South Africa and was plunged at once into the conflict already raging there between the white “colonials” and the Indians of all classes who were resident among them. He succeeded in unifying his compatriots, and in presenting a dignified case against the way in which they were being treated. He did not wholly succeed in obtaining redress of their grievances, but by his wise handling of the case he secured for them certain concessions.

In the Boer War, Gandhi formed from among the Indians in South Africa an ambulance corps which rendered valuable service to the British Army and won a tribute of admiration and gratitude. In the First World War, also, Gandhi supported the British side and even went so far as to take part in a campaign in India for recruiting Indians for the combative services. He expected that when the war was over the British would, in their turn, concede a wide measure of independence to his country; and the small instalment of self-government which was actually conferred disillusioned him.

In the interval between the two world wars Gandhi became the spearhead of the independence movement in India. In order to

appreciate the political strategy which he adopted, it is necessary to realize that there were (as in all similar cases) not two but three possible courses that might have been followed. The first was to accept with gratitude such progressive instalments of freedom as the British were prepared to concede to Indians, to make full use of the facilities so provided for learning the art of self-government, and thereby to convince their rulers that they were fit for further advance. This course was favoured not only by the vast majority of the British people, but by a large number of his own fellow-subjects in India.

Gandhi rejected it for three reasons. First, he was becoming increasingly sceptical of the bona fides of British intentions. He doubted whether, if left to themselves, the British would ever withdraw their stranglehold upon India. Secondly, he was not enamoured of the pattern of a self-governing India which seemed to be emerging. It would be a westernized country, alien to the indigenous instincts of her people, and it would be dominated by wealthy and princely Indians in league with European vested interests. In the third place, he wanted to raise the stature of his own countrymen. It was contrary to their dignity to sit meekly waiting for such favours as the British were graciously pleased to bestow upon them.

The second course was violent rebellion. This also had its adherents in India, some of whom were already putting it into practice in the ugly form of sabotage and assassination. Gandhi rejected this course out of hand. Not only was it morally repugnant to him, but he realized that, even if it proved ultimately successful (which was at least doubtful), the path to victory would be bloody and the independent India which would emerge at the end would be torn and distracted, weak, poor and surrounded by enemies.

The third course, which in fact he chose, was "non-violent non-cooperation." It was designed to render government impossible by the active withdrawal of the consent of the governed. In some respects it was comparable, but not identical, with the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland and the earlier militancy of the suffragettes. It included such activities as the illegal manufacture of salt, the practice of home spinning, and individual and mass *satyagraha*. The progress of this agitation, its successes and its setbacks have been described in detail in earlier chapters of this book. The verdict of history has

still to be given; but India has already made up her mind and has acclaimed his policy as the main lever by means of which independence was attained. And personally I agree with her. It awakened the soul of India. It sapped the will of the British people to maintain their rule. It prevented a bloodstained rebellion.

Gandhi's whole attitude to war underwent development during his life, and by the time that the Second World War began his views had crystallized into fundamental opposition to the use of violence, even in self-defence against a war of aggression. There is much confusion in the popular mind between pacifism and passivism. Gandhi was emphatically a pacifist, and most certainly not a passivist. In other words, while he was opposed to the use of methods of war to combat war, he was even more strongly opposed to tame acquiescence in unjust domination, which he denounced as cowardice. He believed that the right counter to aggressive war was a form of non-violent resistance which would render the fruits of aggression unobtainable by the aggressor.

To the western mind it was all equally foolishness; and even among his own friends in India his views had only a limited amount of support. So that when the Working Committee of Congress were prepared to strike a bargain with the British, on the basis of cooperation in the war effort provided the independence of India at its close was guaranteed—with a substantial instalment of it on account—Gandhi and Congress parted company. But the severance was only for a time, because the British Government were not prepared to accept the Congress terms.

What will history say of Gandhi's policy on the matter? War is a terrible evil. Even a so-called "righteous" war of defence brings frightful evils in its train. Each successive war sees the invention of new and more deadly weapons. If wars are to continue with atom bombs and perhaps bacteriological warfare, and who knows what fresh horror, can civilization survive? The world may yet be forced to think again of some escape from self-destruction along Gandhi's lines. If so, the fact that his policy would involve the self-immolation of vast numbers of people might be only the lesser of two gigantic evils. But could any nation rise to the heights demanded of it by the Mahatma? And if any considerable part of its population persisted

in its preference for the older methods of violent resistance, could the adoption of the Gandhian policy by the remainder produce the postulated results ?

Gandhi was a determined opponent of untouchability, which he rightly rejected as a blot on the fair name of India. Though a believer in the caste system of Hinduism, he strove valiantly to mitigate and put an end to all the restrictions and indignities imposed by custom on the scheduled castes. He even went so far as to break in his own person, and to encourage other high-caste Hindus to break, all the traditional tabus which separated them from the lower castes. He took a low-caste girl to live in his house. He loved to make his dwelling in the Sweepers' quarter of Delhi. He renamed the lower castes *harijans* (God's children) and gave that title to his own weekly paper. Though he did not succeed in rooting out the evil completely, he did more than any other single Indian to rouse public opinion among Hindus against it and to shame them into putting into practice a more enlightened and humane relationship.

At the same time, he opposed any attempt by the *harijans* to organize themselves for revolt against their high-caste masters. He resented the use of the words "caste Hindus" to distinguish the higher from the lower castes, claiming that they all belonged to the Hindu caste system. He even fasted successfully against the "MacDonald award," which would have given them separate electorates. In all this he incurred the hostility of a considerable section who would rather have fought for their emancipation in their own way.

Gandhi may well have been right in opposing separate electorates, which carry many evils in their train. He may also have been right in believing that he could win for the Untouchables more concessions by his own persuasive advocacy and example than they were likely to win by shock tactics, which would have antagonized their well-wishers in the opposite camp. But many of the Untouchables themselves did not think so; and they claimed, with some show of reason, that in this matter he, as a member of the dominant party, was taking precisely the same stand as that against which he battled so valiantly in other matters where he belonged to the party of the oppressed.

Gandhi saw in the whole of geographical India one country, and in her peoples one nation. It was his passion to unite all her races

and religious communities together, and to secure their independence as a single unit which could take its proud place among the greatest nations of the world. In this grand conception he appeared at one time likely to be successful. During the Caliphate agitation he had the support of the Muslim world; and large numbers of Muslims, including Jinnah himself, were enrolled under the Congress banner to fight in cooperation with the Hindus for the emancipation of their common country. Had Britain been prepared at that time to concede full self-government, Gandhi's dream of a united independent India within the British Commonwealth might have seen fulfilment.

But the matter was never put to the test. The psychological moment was allowed to slip by, never to return. Muslims and Hindus drifted apart. The Muslim membership of the All-India Congress steadily declined. The Muslim League took on the character of a rival organization. Jinnah became convinced that in any system of government based on popular election Muslims could never depend on impartial justice under a permanent Hindu majority. The two-nation theory took shape, and was crystallized into the demand for Pakistan, with the corollary that there must be two Constituent Assemblies to frame constitutions for the two Dominions.

To Gandhi this was repellent. It would be a reversal of the whole trend of modern history. It was not true that Muslims and Hindus were racially distinct; many Muslims had Hindu ancestry. There were no areas exclusively Muslim or exclusively Hindu; Muslims and non-Muslims interpenetrated throughout the length and breadth of India. His work for the last thirty years had been devoted to securing the independence of a united country, and now that it was so near fruition he was not prepared to contemplate seeing it undone. There must be one constitution for the whole of India, and one Constituent Assembly must be brought together to frame it.

This was the ideological deadlock which the Cabinet Mission was sent out to India in 1946 to break down. Their scheme of a three-tier constitution was designed to effect a compromise, and as such it stood or fell as a whole. It was not an award but a skeleton proposal which the Indian parties, if they accepted it, could clothe with flesh and blood by common agreement. Jinnah was prepared to give the

scheme general acceptance. Gandhi was prepared to accept it provided he was allowed to put his own interpretations on certain clauses. For Jinnah these interpretations destroyed the basis of the scheme, and though the political leaders of Congress were prepared to be more accommodating than Gandhi, Jinnah remained dissatisfied and the attempt to convert the scheme into a constitution was never made.

On one point there was a consensus of opinion among all the parties concerned, including the British Government and including Mahatma Gandhi. If any settlement were opposed by the people of any substantial area of the country there could be no coercion to enforce their submission. This meant in effect that, quite independently of any view of the British Government, no settlement was possible that did not command the acceptance, or at least the acquiescence, of the Muslim world. And if the scheme proposed by the Cabinet Mission was to be discarded because there was no agreed basis on which it could function, and if no alternative compromise solution could be found, the Muslim demand for the partition of India would have to be conceded. Gandhi remained unconvinced. But the sands of time were running out. The danger drew ever nearer that popular feeling would become so excited by the continued political conflict between the leaders that it would burst out into flame before any settlement had been effected. In that case there would be nothing to prevent chaos and massacre spreading throughout the length and breadth of the land. It was because the ordinary political leaders of all parties did realize this awful possibility that they accepted a compromise solution which none of them fully liked but which, by registering their agreement, at least enabled them, by acting in conjunction, to check and localize the civil commotion when it actually occurred.

Once Congress had definitely accepted this compromise Gandhi bowed to their decision and loyally worked to give effect to it. When on 15 August, 1947, the two Dominions came into being and the Punjab and Bengal were each cut in two, it was Gandhi who, by his presence in Calcutta, saved Bengal from civil strife, and later it was he who finally extinguished the communal flames in Delhi. None but the saintly person of the Mahatma could have worked those miracles. No words of ordinary praise are adequate to express the debt owed

to him by his country, and by humanity the world over, for these missions of peace for which in the end he paid the price of his life.

The political historian is constrained to ask, however, and to attempt to answer, the question as to why it was that Gandhi was content to allow things to drift so long. Why did he not make greater effort to reach an accommodation with Jinnah on the basis of some compromise solution (that of the Cabinet Mission, or some other, if it could be found), and in default why did he not see the necessity of accepting some form of Pakistan before the situation got out of hand? One obvious explanation is that Gandhi continued to the end to entertain the hope that, if Congress stood firm, the Muslims would be driven by no compulsion other than the logic of events to abandon their claim to partition and would come into some acceptable federal, if not unitary, India. If that hope had been the sole reason for his attitude it might have been possible to convince him of its unreality.

But Gandhi had a deeper reason. He was firmly convinced that the partition of India was contrary to God's will and that, as such, to resist it was a holy duty. Against such a conviction, sustained by his inner voice, mere political argument about the probable consequences of a refusal to compromise, or about the desirability of choosing the lesser evil, counted for nothing. It was man's business to act in accordance with God's will as he understood it. If he did that the fruits of action did not rest with him. They rested with God.

That, as I understood it, was his answer at the time. But what response would he make today if the politician in all humility of heart were to say: "You, the Mahatma, who are ever conscious of the immanence of God, who have constantly purified yourself by prayer and fasting, you are entitled to claim that you hear the voice of God and know His will. I can only act in the light of what seem to me the probable consequences of my actions. If the consequences of some suggested course appear likely to be evil I conclude that it is not in accordance with God's will and I eschew that course."

But when we turn to the Mahatma for his final answer we see instead the funeral pyre. And from that pyre comes the message which came from the Cross two thousand years ago:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that  
a man lay down his life for his friends."



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